

PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896



October 2013

Vol. 118, No. 10

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THE ROAD TO WISDOM

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON *Work Without Motive 2*

GITA teaches Karma-Yoga. We should work through Yoga (concentration). In such concentration in action (Karma-Yoga), there is no consciousness of the lower ego present. The consciousness that I am doing this and that is never present when one works through Yoga. The Western people do not understand this. They say that if there be no consciousness of ego, if this ego is gone, how then can a man work? But when one works with concentration, losing all consciousness of oneself the work that is done will be infinitely better, and this every one may have experienced in his own life. We perform many works subconsciously, such as the digestion of food etc., many others consciously ... If the painter, losing the consciousness of his ego, becomes completely immersed in his painting, he will be able to produce masterpieces. The good cook concentrates his whole self on the food-material he handles; he loses all other consciousness for the time being. But they are only able to do perfectly a single work in this way, to which they are habituated. The Gita teaches that all works should be done thus. He who is one with the Lord through Yoga performs all his works by becoming immersed in concentration, and does not seek any personal benefit. Such a performance of work brings only good to the world, no evil can come out of it. Those who work thus never do anything for themselves.



The result of every work is mixed with good and evil. There is no good work that has not a touch of evil in it. Like smoke round the fire, some evil always clings to work. We should engage in such works as bring the largest amount of good and the smallest measure of evil. We are reading the Gita by candle-light, but numbers of insects are being burnt to death. Thus it is seen that some evil clings to work. Those who work without any consciousness of their lower ego are not affected with evil, for they work for the good of the world. To work without motive, to work unattached, brings the highest bliss and freedom. This secret of Karma-Yoga is taught by the Lord Shri Krishna in the Gita.

From *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 5.247-48.



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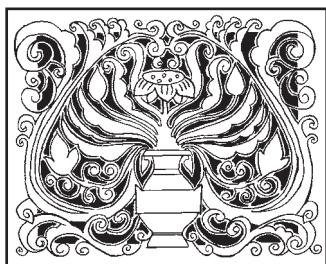


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Amrita Kalasha

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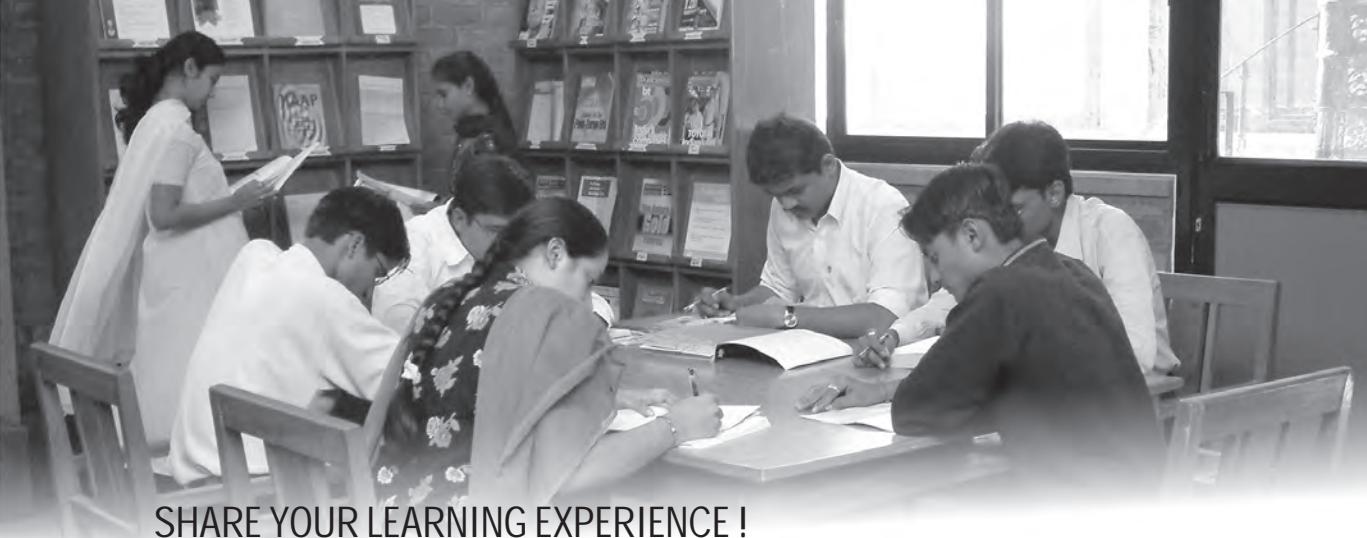
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This is the Hindi version of the English Film ‘Vivekananda by Vivekananda’ which was released in January 2012 and the same was well received by devotees, admirers of Swamiji, and general public. Tamil version of the Film was also released last month under the title *Vivekanandarai Patri Vivekanandar*. The DVD (PAL) is available for sale on Chennai Math’s online Store at the link:

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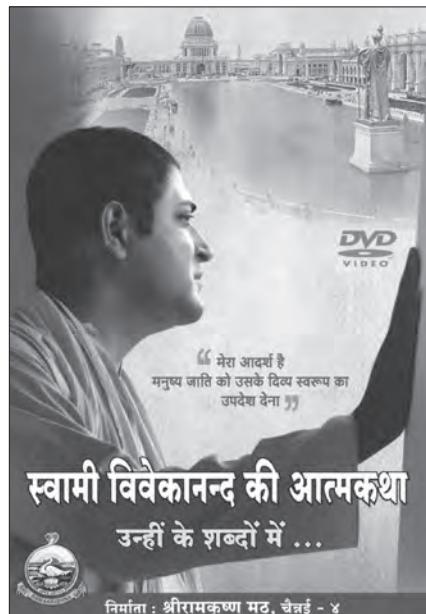
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Concept, Script, Screenplay and Direction: Karthik Saragur.

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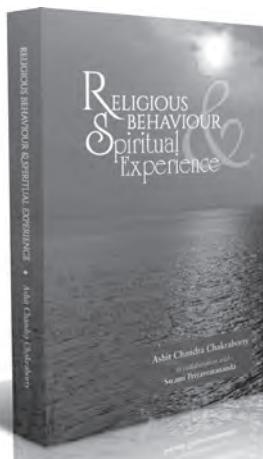
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Existence Giving Rise to Existence

October 2013
Vol. 118, No. 10

इमाः सोम्य नद्यः पुरस्तात्प्राच्यः स्यन्दन्ते पश्चात्प्रतीच्यस्ताः समुद्रात्समुद्रमेवापियन्ति
स समुद्रं एव भवति ता यथा तत्र न विदुरियमहमस्मीयमहमस्मीति ॥
एवमेव खलु सोम्येमाः सर्वाः प्रजाः सत आगम्य न विदुः सत आगच्छामह इति
त इह व्याघ्रो वा सिंहो वा वृको वा वराहो वा कीटो वा पतङ्गो वा दंशो वा
मशको वा यद्यद्भवन्ति तदाभवन्ति ॥

O good-looking one, these eastward rivers flow to the east, and westward rivers flow to the west; (they rise) from the sea and merge in the sea itself. They become one with the sea. As they do not realize there that ‘I am this (river)’, ‘I am that (river)’, in this very way indeed, O good-looking one, all these creatures having come from Existence do not realize that ‘We have come from Existence’. Whichever creatures they were here (in this world)—whether tiger, lion, wolf, pig, insect, grasshopper, gadfly, or mosquito—they become that.

(*Chhandogya Upanishad*, 6.10.2)

ब्रह्म तं परादाद्योऽन्यत्रात्मनो ब्रह्म वेद क्षत्रं तं परादाद्योऽन्यत्रात्मनः क्षत्रं वेद
लोकास्तं परादुर्योऽन्यत्रात्मनो लोकान्वेद देवास्तं परादुर्योऽन्यत्रात्मनो देवान्वेद
भूतानि तं परादुर्योऽन्यत्रात्मनो भूतानि वेद सर्वं तं परादाद्योऽन्यत्रात्मनः सर्वं वेद
इदं ब्रह्म इदं क्षत्रम् इमे लोकाः इमे देवाः इमानि भूतानि इदं सर्वं यदयमात्मा ॥

The brahmana rejects one who knows him as different from the Atman. The kshatriya rejects one who knows him as different from the Atman. The worlds reject one who knows them as different from the Atman. The gods reject one who knows them as different from the Atman. Beings reject one who knows them as different from the Atman. All rejects one who knows all as different from the Atman. This brahmana, this kshatriya, these worlds, these gods, these beings, and this All are the Atman.

(*Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 2.4.6)

THIS MONTH

We mistakenly choose to live surrounded by external and internal shadows. This human folly can be corrected by **Coming out of the Shadows** towards the light of Consciousness, which is our real nature.



have reappeared as Sri Ramakrishna in this age. **Sri Chaitanya in the Sheath of Sri Nityananda** is a translation of the author's talk in Bengali at the Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata.

Swami Vivekananda's mission and work in the West is highlighted more than his Asian mission and ideas. In **Swami Vivekananda and Asian Consciousness** Niraj Kumar, president of the Society for Asian Integration, writes about Swamiji's vision for Asia.

Many people have interpreted John Keats's remarkable poems. Sayan Bhattacharyya, a guest lecturer at Pandua College of Education, West Bengal, interprets with insight '**Ode to a Nightingale**' in the Light of Vedanta.



India is passing through a phase of tremendous transformation of national and individual ideals. Swami Samarpanananda of Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University, Belur Math, proposes in **Ideals for a New India** a set of principles to be followed in the present process of India's rejuvenation.

In the final part of **An Imaginary Interview with Sri Ramakrishna** Swami Chetanananda, Minister-in-charge, Vedanta Society of St Louis, concludes his views on Sri Ramakrishna's life and times.

In the thirteenth part of **Eternal Words**, Swami Adbhutananda directs our attention to the important aspects of sadhana and the need for steadfastness in devotion to the Chosen Ideal. The swami's words are translated from *Sat Katha*, published by Udbodhan Office, Kolkata.



The sixteenth instalment of **Svarajya Siddhih: Attaining Self-dominion** by the eighteenth century Gangadharendra Saraswati, fifteenth pontiff of Kanchi Kamakoti Pitham, Kanchipuram, shows that the Yoga, Nyaya, and Vaisheshika concepts of Ishvara are inadequate.

Coming out of the Shadows

EVERY OBJECT IS invariably associated with its shadow because there is light, and this light has a source such as the sun. This phenomenon is universal and is universally taken for granted. Some objects throw multiple shadows due to multiple or reflected light sources. In the 'Allegory of the Cave', found in Plato's *Republic*, Socrates says that we are like shackled prisoners in a cave deep inside a mountain with our backs towards the entrance. On a cave wall we watch the shadows of people and objects passing between us and a fire that lies above and behind us. The bound prisoners cannot see anything else and ascribe forms and reality to the shadows. Socrates teaches us that an awakened philosopher is like one freed from the shackles; he understands that the shadows are not real because he sees the source of light, he sees the reality.

There are other types of shadows: speak a lie and a detectable shadow crosses your face and eyes. Every city and town has a shadowy side of crime and human degradation. Similarly, there are shadows of sadness around happiness, sickness hovering over health, doubts allied with facts, death stalking life, ignorance mixed with knowledge. One thought, one *chitta-vritti*, throws its shadow on another thought, and a second thought on a third, and so forth in an infinite series. The strongest shadows in the mind are those of beliefs, especially irrational ones. They can distort perception to an astonishing degree. When this happens a person cannot see the light, even if it shines in his or her face. A shadow can also throw itself on the very

object that has produced it, sometimes distorting it. This also occurs when the ego throws its shadow on the mind and the mind on the ego. Occasionally objects become shadowy and shadows appear to be real, as if they were coming alive on their own. In these cases the internal objects are subtle and the source of light is the individual consciousness.

We live in a physical and mental universe of lights and shadows. Swami Vivekananda says: 'This standing between knowledge and ignorance, this mystic twilight, the mingling of truth and falsehood—and where they meet—no one knows. We are walking in the midst of a dream, half sleeping, half waking, passing all our lives in a haze; this is the fate of everyone of us. This is the fate of all sense-knowledge. This is the fate of all philosophy, of all boasted science, of all boasted human knowledge. This is the universe.'

Eratosthenes, a Greek mathematician and librarian at Alexandria's famed library around 240 BCE, knew that the Earth was spherical, and he was the first to ingeniously perform an almost perfect measurement of the Earth's circumference. Many people had observed at Syene, now Aswan, that during the summer solstice the sun shone at noon directly overhead into a well. But Eratosthenes found that exactly at that time in Alexandria, about 800 kilometres southeast of Syene, the angle of inclination of the sun's rays was about 7.2 degrees. Knowing that angle of inclination and the distance between the two places, he computed the diameter and circumference of the Earth. Down the centuries

humankind has learnt to make use of shadows to understand the world, and also to play with it. Drama, cinema, dance choreography—art in general—use lights and shades to enhance or hide objects, create particular atmospheres, and express moods.

There is a popular story about how a child, one late afternoon, was running about playing with her shadow and trying hard to catch it. However much she tried, she could not succeed and then began to cry. A sadhu, noticing her efforts, came forwards and asked the child to stop running and look at her shadow. She did so, and now the shadow stood still. He then asked her to touch her head, and the shadow did likewise. ‘There,’ he said, ‘you have now caught your shadow!’ The child became happy and stopped running about, catching the shadow in its different places.

The same principle can be used in trying to understand ourselves, without a shadow of doubt. We must be able to stop the mind from running about and still it. As the mind and the ego are stilled, they cast no shadow; then only are we able to catch the source of light, our consciousness. This is known as going back to the source and attaining knowledge. Sri Ramakrishna says: ‘Do you know what it is like? Just at noon the sun is directly overhead. If you look around then, you do not see your shadow. Likewise, you will not find the “shadow” of ego after attaining Knowledge, samadhi.’

In the state of samadhi the mind, after years of practising deep meditation, takes on the form of the object it has meditated upon and loses its separate existence. Sri Ramakrishna tells Dr Mahendralal Sarkar: ‘You said a very fine thing. No one else has said before that samadhi is the result of the union of the mind with God. You alone have said that.’ God is self-luminous, pure Consciousness. Sri Ramakrishna initially used

to worship the image of the Divine Mother Kali at Dakshineswar. As his tremendous devotion progressed, he used to experience ‘a wonderful living Presence in the stone image before him. Now [then] he did not see that image at all when he entered the temple; but saw instead, standing there, the living Mother Herself, all consciousness, and with hands that offered boons and freedom from fear. The Master said, ‘I put the palm of my hand near Her nostrils and felt that Mother was actually breathing. I observed very closely, but I could never see the shadow of the Mother’s divine person on the temple wall in the light of the lamp at night.’

Vedanta teaches that there are different orders of reality in the universe, from grosser to finer levels, ending up in the finest level, termed the causal. A higher order of reality casts its shadow on a lower one, and this shadow in turn becomes an object and casts its shadow again on another lower reality, and so on—objects become shadows and shadows become objects. This is the reason why it is said that the world is a multiple shadow of the Reality. Our physical body is made of food, *annamaya*; it is gross and the shadow of the life force, *prana*, which in turn is the shadow of the mind, *mana*; the mind is the shadow of the intellect, *buddhi*; and the intellect is the shadow of the higher level of bliss, *ananda*, which is the causal state.

Like the child who stopped running about to catch her shadow, we need to stop rushing about trying to find the Reality outside. And just like the child needed to notice the sun to understand the dynamics of the shadow, we need to still the mind and see the source of our light, inside. Just as the sun is one, there is also one universal Consciousness. We need to shift our vision from the individual consciousness, which the *Katha Upanishad* likens to a shadow, to the universal Consciousness and thus become free.

Sri Chaitanya in the Sheath of Sri Nityananda

Swami Devarajananda

BHAGAVAN SAYS in the Bhagavadgita: ‘Though I am birthless, undecaying by nature, and the Lord of beings, (yet) by subjugating my Prakriti, I take birth by means of my own maya.’¹ This doctrine of the avatara has been repeatedly authenticated in the religious history of the world. Sri Chaitanya (1486–1534) was born in Nadia as Vishvambhara Mishra and is considered a partial avatara of Sri Krishna. He is also known as Gauranga, Gaur, Nimai, and Sri Krishna-Chaitanya. Nimai was an outstanding pandit who renounced the world when he was about twenty-four years old. He was initiated into sannyasa by his guru Keshava Bharati at Katua.

The life of Sri Chaitanya is inseparably linked to that of Sri Nityananda. Nityananda Goswami was born in the village of Devachakra in Birbhum. When Nitai was still very young, his parents offered him as alms to an itinerant sannyasin. Nitai grew and became a tantric sannyasin and attained the highest stage of an Avadhuta. An Avadhuta is one who never strays from his path, is worthy of worship by all, has grown out of worldly bondage, and is the personification of the meaning of the Vedantic dictum ‘*Tat tvam asi; Thou art that*’. Sri Dattatreya, an avatara of Vishnu, was the foremost of the Avadhutas. As an itinerant monk Nityananda travelled to many places of pilgrimage. He once met a sannyasin called Shankararanjan, whose pre-monastic name was Vishvarupa, and they became good friends. Vishvarupa was the elder brother of Sri Chaitanya. Later, during his sojourn in Bengal, Nityananda searched and

found Vishvarupa’s pre-monastic home and met his parents Jagannath Mishra and Sachi Devi. Nimai was then at home. As Nityananda was about the same age as Vishvarupa, Sachi Devi would affectionately call him Nitai, rhyming with the name of her younger son Nimai. Nimai and Nitai bonded well and they became like brothers, just as it was with Kanai, Sri Krishna, and his brother Balai, Balarama. It is widely believed that the two great souls that came as Kanai and Balai in the Dvapara Yuga, came again more than five-hundred years ago as Nimai and Nitai. In this age, as we shall see, they have again come together in the form of Sri Ramakrishna.

Sri Ramakrishna’s Unique Vision

Gripped by an uncommon spiritual urge to realize God Sri Ramakrishna wept and prayed intensely to the Divine Mother. His superhuman sadhana finally resulted in the Divine Mother revealing herself to him. After his primary success, he also had many divine visions. While relating one of them he said: ‘The figure of a young Sannyasin looking like me used to come out again and again from within me and instruct me on all matters; when he emerged, sometimes I had a little consciousness and, at other times, lost it altogether and lay inert, only seeing his actions and words; when afterwards he entered this gross body, I regained full consciousness. The Brahmani, Tota Puri and others came and taught me afterwards what I had heard previously—they taught me what I had already known.’²

His lookalike was his own subtle self manifesting as a teacher. Sri Ramakrishna used to say: ‘It is the mind that becomes at last the spiritual teacher and acts as such. A human teacher imparts a Mantra to the ear; the divine Teacher imparts it to the soul’ (562). Nevertheless, Sri Ramakrishna became a disciple to his gurus in order to uphold the teaching and authority of the scriptures. And it is because of his obedience to the scriptures that he later qualified to be a guru par excellence. One of his gurus, Bhairavi Brahmani, who had been searching for him for a long time, eventually arrived at Dakshineswar. Sri Ramakrishna, like a child, poured out his joys and worries to her because he was confused at the changes happening to his body. She listened intently to his spiritual experiences, realizations, and struggles and was stunned. She soon realized that Sri Ramakrishna was not just an extraordinary sadhaka but a divine being. She consoled him and also taught him various disciplines according to the scriptures, which Sri Ramakrishna quickly accomplished.

Sri Ramakrishna, once on his way to the village Sihore, had a significant vision of Sri Chaitanya and Sri Nityananda entering his body. On hearing of that vision the Brahmani became all the more convinced of her own conclusion regarding the Master and said: ‘Chaitanya is manifesting this time in the “sheath” of Nityananda’ (262). The word ‘sheath’ means a close-fitting cover for something else. In this context the sheath is Sri Nityananda enclosing Sri Chaitanya. Swami Saradananda writes: ‘The Brahmani recited the following lines from the *Chaitanya Bhagavata*: “Throwing his arms round Advaita’s neck, Sri Chaitanya says again and again: ‘I will manifest my wonderful play once more. My form will be that of bliss during the singing of the glory of God.’” The Brahmani quoted again, “Gora acts his play even today. It is persons of the

rarest good fortune that are privileged to witness it” (233). Swami Saradananda further writes:

When we were visiting him one day, the Master said to us in connection with the topic of his vision, ‘It is true that I had that vision and it is also true that the Brahmani said so when she heard of it. But how can I say what the real meaning of it is?’ From these words of the Master regarding that vision of his, we think that at this time the Master got some clear indication that, identified with his body and mind, some ancient soul known to the world for very long ages was dwelling here with a view to accomplishing some important purpose (233-4).

While being carried in a palanquin to Sihar, Sri Ramakrishna saw two very beautiful looking boys suddenly coming out of his body. ‘Now advancing with a slow step, now running playfully hither and thither, sometimes going far in the fields in search of wild flowers etc., and at other times walking beside the palanquin, they laughed and joked and conversed and made merry as boys do. They thus proceeded happily for a long time and then they came back and entered his body’ (233). Bhairavi Brahmani confidently told Mathur babu to convene an assembly of pandits well versed in the scriptures in order to prove her conviction, with scriptural testimony, that Sri Ramakrishna was an avatar. Mathur babu argued that it was common knowledge that avatars were ten in number. The Brahmani replied that in the Bhagavata alone twenty-four incarnations have been spoken of, and then said that there are innumerable avatars. Many great scholars attended the convention, including the eminent Vaishnavacharan and Gauri Pandit. The Brahmani quoted the scriptures and spoke of how Sri Ramakrishna’s experiences tallied with them. All the pandits were surprised; they debated but finally left convinced of the Brahmani’s stand.



Sri Ramakrishna having the vision of Nimai and Nitai in Navadvip, by Sujan (2005)

During Sri Ramakrishna's time people were generally disrespectful towards the Vaishnavas, as they believed them to be in general lowly people. They were also sceptical about Sri Chaitanya being an avatara. Some among Sri Ramakrishna's disciples also asked him this question in order to remove their doubts. Sri Ramakrishna admitted that formerly he too had that attitude and that there is no mention of Sri Chaitanya in the Puranas and the Bhagavata. But a trip to Navadvip with Mathur babu changed all that: 'I thought that if he were an incarnation, there must linger there a little at least of the manifestation; I shall understand it when I see it' (813). Sri Ramakrishna walked in different places of Navadvip but saw nothing particular anywhere and regretted going there. As he was stepping into the boat for the return trip however, he had a wonderful vision: 'Two beautiful boys of tender age—I never saw such beauty; they had the complexion of molten gold—each having a halo of light around his head, raising their hands and looking at me, were running towards me through the sky. And I cried

out immediately, "There they come, there they come." Scarcely had I uttered these words before they came and entered here (his own body); I lost normal consciousness and fell down' (814).

He also told his disciples of his vision of Sri Chaitanya's *sankirtan*, devotional singing, and how it influenced contemporary society:

Standing outside his room, he saw wonderful waves of Sankirtan coming towards him from the Panchavati, proceeding towards the main gate of the Dakshineswar garden and disappearing behind the tree. He witnessed that, absorbed in the love of God, Gauranga, the moon of Navadvip, was proceeding with a slow gait in the centre with Nityananda and Advaita on either side, surrounded by a dense multitude. They were in a state of spiritual inebriation produced by God-love, some expressing the bliss of their hearts by losing control over themselves and others by wild dances. The crowd was so great that it looked as if there was no end to the number of people there (442).

He saw some faces in the crowd that remained



'Gauranga's Sankirtan', by Tamonashchandra Dasgupta (c.1700)

(Sri Ramakrishna saw this painting at the schoolhouse of Gadhadhar, a celebrated Vaishnava saint)

stamped on his mind forever. He later recognized Balaram babu and Master Mahashay as those who were among the crowd of *sankirtan* singers. Once asked by the Master what he thought about him, Master Mahashay said: 'I feel that Christ, Sri Chaitanya, and yourself—all three are one and the same. It is the same Person that has become all these three.'³ Sri Ramakrishna replied: 'Yes, yes! One! One! It is indeed one. Don't you see that it is He alone who dwells here in this way' (*ibid.*).

Similarities between Sri Chaitanya and Sri Ramakrishna

Before going deeper into the basic premise that Sri Ramakrishna's body was that of Nityananda,

we would rather concentrate for now on Sri Chaitanya's reappearance in the Master. Quite a number of similarities are visible between Sri Chaitanya and Sri Ramakrishna. There are dissimilarities as well, but they are not many. Regarding book-learning Sri Chaitanya had attained great scholastic achievements, whereas the Master had nothing to claim in this respect. This of course does not mean that the Master did not have the necessary training or the insight that mattered. Of his own choice, the Master had foregone book-learning, treating it as redundant for his purpose. Were Sri Ramakrishna a person of great learning, his teachings might have played a very different role from what we know of them.

In the case of Sri Chaitanya, the social and cultural milieu during his time valued book-learning.

The degeneration of social and religious values when Sri Chaitanya was born was no different from Sri Ramakrishna's time. A grossly degraded form of Buddhism was rampant during Sri Chaitanya's time. At that time there was a belief that religious activities were a means for enjoying a sensuous life to the fullest, in this world and the next. Vain cerebral gymnastics replaced the ideal of renunciation, which is the essence of religion. Such intellectuality failed to give guidance and solace to people. There were others, of course, who had developed a complete lack of faith in religion; life's enjoyments were all they were concerned with. Moreover, the evils of caste had grown monstrously and high-caste people were exploiting and tyrannizing those of castes lower than them.

An almost similar state of religious turmoil was prevalent when Sri Ramakrishna was born. The phenomenal rise of the material sciences raised doubts about the existence of God. People were sick and tired of the squabbles and conflicts among warring groups of different religious sects. Many lost interest in religion because it failed to bring peace and joy. There were also pseudo-religious people who became selfish and did not care about the world. For instance, failing to manage the affairs of his family, Pratapchandra Hazra excused himself from his duties and pretended to be religious. Even the Master's chiding could not make him go home and care for his family. Oddly enough, many believed that because such people practised religion, it was others' duty to take care of their families. Religion had become a breeding ground of superstitions and secret rites for wealth, power, and pleasure. Each silly notion was promoted as religious truth to fool the gullible. Those who were educated became sceptics and derided religion.

We can draw another parallel between Sri Chaitanya and Sri Ramakrishna. Since childhood their innate divinity would often flash spontaneously, reminding them of who they really were. Nimai's parents used to feed any guest that came to their house, especially sadhus. Once Sachi Devi cooked food and offered it to a hungry sadhu. As the sadhu was dedicating the food to his chosen deity with his eyes closed, before partaking of it, he heard a child's voice imploring him to open his eyes. On doing so he saw Nimai eating the food and realized at once that the deity, to whom he was dedicating his food, was none but the child Nimai. And it was not by design that Nimai did it. A parallel incident had occurred in the life of Sri Ramakrishna. Once his father Kshudiram sat down to worship Raghuvir. A garland of flowers meant for the deity was lying by his side. Kshudiram sat meditating with his eyes closed. The child Gadadhar began nudging his father, telling him to open his eyes and look at him who had bedecked himself with the garland meant for Raghuvir. The fact that Raghuvir had come in the form of Sri Ramakrishna was thus revealed to Kshudiram.⁴

They were akin to each other in yet another respect. Before he came to be known as Sri Chaitanya, Nimai observed that in spite of teaching his followers to seek God by devotedly repeating the name of Hari, he was not very successful. People came and joined him in singing *sankirtan*, but no sooner had they returned home than they became their old selves and let themselves be lured by worldly enjoyments. He felt he had to set things right. He knew that people are guided by noble souls, not so much by their precepts but by what they did. He realized that while he preached renunciation ordinary people viewed him as one leading a life with possessions—a beautiful wife, enough money, great learning—and thought of him as a hypocrite. As a matter of

fact, Nimai was not leading a worldly life; he was utterly detached from the world. But judging by his outward circumstances, people took him to be otherwise. He then resolved to leave home and embrace sannyasa, highlighting the message that renouncing everything for the sake of God was the highest ideal that everyone should strive for. But if he went away, his followers would surely suffer the pangs of separation—such thoughts gnawed at him and threw him in a real quandary.

The same thing was repeated in the life of Sri Ramakrishna. In his youth Gadadhara often questioned the worthiness of leading a life of little meaning and merit, which everybody was doing. Unless he realized God, of what use was his speaking and thinking of God so much? He felt he had to plunge deep into the ocean of sadhana by casting aside everything familiar

and dear. Yet he was plagued by the thought of leaving all those who loved his happy company, his singing and his joy in everything. Thus both Sri Chaitanya and Sri Ramakrishna suffered indecision over leaving home in their early youth. And, undoubtedly, in both cases it was an urge to do good to others that they had to deal with.

Sri Chaitanya plunged headlong into sadhana and meditated on the *mahavakya*, great saying, he had heard from his guru after being initiated into sannyasa. Within a very short time he attained *nirvikalpa* samadhi. His mind did resurface and become conscious of the world around him because he had to give himself over to help humanity. The same thing happened in the case of Sri Ramakrishna. On his embracing sannyasa, Tota Puri made him withdraw his mind from everything and plunge it into the Atman.

Sri Chaitanya accepting sannyasa



But the Master found it difficult to withdraw his mind from the form of the Divine Mother. Tota Puri would have none of it; he pressed a shard of glass between his pupil's eyebrows and asked him to concentrate there. Sri Ramakrishna then entered into *nirvikalpa* samadhi. Later he wanted to be merged completely in it, but at the Divine Mother's behest he had to come back to this world in order to do good to it.

Sri Chaitanya used to enter into and re-emerge from any of the three different states of consciousness. Sri Ramakrishna explained:

Chaitanya experienced three states of mind. First, the conscious state, when his mind dwelt on the gross and the subtle. Second, the semi-conscious state, when his mind entered the causal body and was absorbed in the bliss of divine intoxication. Third, the inmost state, when his mind was merged in the Great Cause. ... While conscious of the outer world, Chaitanya sang the name of God; while in the state of partial consciousness, he danced with the devotees; and while in the inmost state of consciousness, he remained absorbed in samadhi (330).

We find that in the life of the Master too these three stages of consciousness were typically repeated over and over. In fact, when he was describing Sri Chaitanya's three states Master Mahashaya wondered: 'Is the Master hinting at the different states of his own mind? There is much similarity between Chaitanya and the Master' (*ibid.*).

While Sri Ramakrishna's mind was fully absorbed in samadhi, his body appeared lifeless. Once a doctor examined him while in that state and ascertained that his respiration and heart were not functioning. Even touching the eyeball with a finger did not evoke a response from his autonomic nervous system. In this state of samadhi there is no trace of 'I'. At a stage lower than this a token sense of 'I and mine' faintly

reappears, and the mind struggles to settle down within the body. There is the awareness that from 'I' this world had indeed been issued; such awareness marks the state of partial inward consciousness. While in this state one does not become fully aware of the surroundings or the world. Stepping down still further one regains the awareness of the normal self and can then talk, see, think, and so on. But it cannot be determined in advance at what time one might go into such higher states again.

Both Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Chaitanya have been known to have slipped into such divine spells even at the slightest stimulus. Once Sri Chaitanya was passing through a village and learnt that the *khols*, drums, were made from the clay of that place. The fact that people sing and dance taking Hari's name—the object of devotees' hearts—during *sankirtan* to the accompaniment of such *khols* made Sri Chaitanya go into samadhi. While visiting the zoo in Calcutta Sri Ramakrishna saw a lion, which reminded him of the Divine Mother Durga, and went into samadhi. This may seem trifling but the subjective thoughts associated with what they heard or saw were strong enough for both Sri Chaitanya and Sri Ramakrishna to raise their consciousness to the highest level.

(To be concluded)

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Swami Vivekananda and Asian Consciousness

Niraj Kumar

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA should be credited with inspiring intellectuals to work for and promote Asian integration. He directly and indirectly influenced most of the early proponents of pan-Asianism. Okakura, Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, and Benoy Sarkar owe much to Swamiji for their pan-Asian views.

Swamiji's marvellous and entralling speech at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago on 11 September 1893 and his subsequent popularity in the West and India moulded him into a spokesman for Asiatic civilization.

Huston Smith, the renowned author of *The World's Religions*, which sold over two million copies, views Swamiji as the representative of the East. He states:

Spiritually speaking, Vivekananda's words and presence at the 1893 World Parliament of Religions brought Asia to the West decisively. For, reading correctly the spiritual hunger of the West that his words and presence brought to the surface, Vivekananda went on to found the Ramakrishna Mission whose centres in almost every major city of Europe and America launched the influx of Asian spirituality that has changed the religious complexion of those continents permanently. Buddhism, Sufism, Sikhism, Baha'i and others have followed, but Vedanta was the pioneer.¹

Swamiji and Buddha

Swamiji was viewed not merely as a Hindu monk but as someone who had come from the East with a new message. The US was on the cusp

of transformation into a great power. On the other hand, Asia emerged as the land of Buddha. Edwin Arnold, who was then the principal of Deccan College, Pune, wrote a biographical work on Buddha in verse titled *Light of Asia* in 1879. Buddha stirred Western imagination. The book attracted Western intellectuals towards Buddhism. German philosophers like Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche saw Buddhism as the world religion.

Swamiji also fulfilled the expectations of Transcendentalists across the West. He did not limit himself merely to Hinduism; he spoke about Buddhism at length during his Chicago addresses. He devoted a complete speech to 'Buddhism, the Fulfilment of Hinduism' on 26 September 1893 and stated: 'I repeat, Shakya Muni came not to destroy, but he was the fulfilment, the logical conclusion, the logical development of the religion of the Hindus.'² He further mentioned: 'Hinduism cannot live without Buddhism, nor Buddhism without Hinduism' (1.23).

No doubt he was viewed as a Buddhist as much as a Hindu during his lifetime by many people of the US. On 19 March 1894 Swamiji spoke at the Detroit auditorium on 'Buddhism, the Religion of the Light of Asia' and concluded that 'Buddhism was the foundation of even the Christian religion, that the catholic church came from Buddhism' (7.430). He allowed this image to be cultivated: that he belonged to the Orient and was also the true representative of the *Light of Asia*!

When he returned to Detroit, the local newspapers attacked him severely. The *Detroit Evening News* wrote: ‘The Hindoo-Brahmin-Buddhistic fad of an effete and rotten orientalism has run its course in the west, and it has been found that there is nothing in it.’³ John Lincoln Blauss, a US citizen, wrote a long letter to the *New York Times* on 19 May 1897, under the caption ‘Dropping into Buddhism: How Members of the Brooklyn Ethical Society Came to It’, regarding a report that the Brooklyn Ethical Society performed Buddhist rites. Blauss blasted Swami Vivekananda who, in his view, represented Buddhism at the Parliament of Religions at Chicago. He held Swamiji responsible for the growing popularity of Buddhism.⁴

Swamiji himself admits that he was following the path of Buddha. In fact, his close disciples like Sister Nivedita and Sara Bull were convinced that he was Buddha’s reincarnation. Swamiji referred to a vision of Buddha he had in his childhood:

I saw the wonderful figure of a monk appear suddenly—from where I did not know—and stand before me at a little distance, filling the room with a divine effulgence. He was in ochre robes with a Kamandalu (water-pot) in his hand. His face bore such a calm and serene expression of inwardness born of indifference to all things, that I was amazed and felt much drawn to him. He walked towards me with a slow step, his eyes steadfastly fixed on me, as if he wanted to say something. But I was seized with fear and could not keep still. I got up from my seat, opened the door, and quickly left the room. The next moment I thought, ‘Why this foolish fear?’ I became bold and went back into the room to listen to the monk, who, alas, was no longer there. I waited long in vain, feeling dejected and repenting that I had been so stupid as to flee without listening to him. I have seen many monks, but never have I seen such an extraordinary expression on any other face.

That face has been indelibly printed on my heart. It may have been a hallucination; but very often I think that I had the good fortune of seeing Lord Buddha that day.⁵

Sister Nivedita mentions, in the diary she kept during their pilgrimage to Kashmir and North India, the swami’s reaction when he was passionately speaking of Buddha: “Why Swami, I did not know that you were a Buddhist!” “Madam”, he said, rounding on her, his whole face aglow with the inspiration of that name, “I am the servants of the servants of the servants of Buddha.”⁶ Sara Bull, whom Swamiji addressed as ‘mother’, identified Swamiji as Buddha before her untimely death in 1911.⁷

Swamiji’s devotion towards Buddha can be gleaned from the fact that a few months before Sri Ramakrishna left this earthly abode, Swamiji undertook a pilgrimage to Bodh Gaya in April 1886. At Kashipur the Master’s disciples used to discuss the life and message of Buddha. They had also inscribed on their meditation room the famous saying of Buddha: ‘Let this body dry up on its seat; let its flesh and bones dissolve: without attaining the Enlightenment which is difficult to achieve even in aeons, this body shall not rise from its seat.’⁸ Swamiji again visited Bodh Gaya just before his early *parinirvana* in February 1902, along with Japanese art historian Okakura Kakuzo. He had an inkling that he would not survive long enough to establish a fusion of Buddhism and neo-Hinduism after this visit. In a letter to Swami Swarupananda from Gopal Lal Villa, Benares Cantonment, Swamiji wrote: ‘A total revolution has occurred in my mind about the relation of Buddhism and Neo-Hinduism. I may not live to work out the glimpses, but I shall leave the lines of work indicated, and you and your brethren will have to work it out.’⁹

Though Swamiji is often represented as the enunciator of modern Hinduism and the

establisher of the Vedanta movement in the West, his appropriation of Buddha's growing popularity to represent himself as the 'Light of Asia' often goes unnoticed.

Swamiji and Japan

Swamiji was preparing to stir the Asian consciousness. He wrote a series of articles—from 1899 to 1901—articulating his conception of Asia in *Udbodhan*, the Bengali monthly of the Ramakrishna Order. The series was later published under the title 'The East and The West'. In this work he reflected over Japan, China, the Arab world, and the Persian civilization on the one hand, and on France, Britain, and the US on the other. Swamiji was building up his ideas for his Eastern mission. He passed away on 4 July 1902 and his dream of revisiting Japan and other Asian countries to champion the cause of a confident and united Asia did not materialize. But he passed the baton of this great ideal to the Japanese art historian and philosopher Okakura Kakuzo (1863–1913).

Swamiji had a fleeting brush with maritime Asia. His life was too short to make a foray into continental Asia. But he could see a thread of commonality among Asian cultures by even a brief encounter. His first visit to Japan was en route to Chicago in 1893. The first port he arrived at from Canton was Nagasaki. He also went to Kobe, Yokohama, Tokyo, and Kyoto. He was surprised to discover Sanskrit mantras written in old Bengali characters in some of the temples there.¹⁰ In this very early encounter he expressed his desire to establish a greater exchange between China, Japan, and India: 'I cannot write what I have in my mind about the Japs in one short letter. Only I want that numbers of our young men should pay a visit to Japan and China every year. Especially to the Japanese, India is still the dreamland of everything high

and good.'¹¹

In 1901–2 Okakura Kakuzo, famous for his work *The Ideals of the East* and credited with raising the 'Asian consciousness', came to Calcutta. The first reference to the interaction between the two Asian heroes occurs in a letter written by Swamiji from Belur Math, on 14 June 1901, to Josephine MacLeod, who was then in Japan. Swamiji wrote in the postscript that he received an invitation to visit Japan and a cheque of 300 rupees from Okakura. After his reflections on 'The East and The West' articles, Swamiji was gearing up to establish a connection between India and Japan as the first step towards harmonizing Asia. In a letter dated 14 June 1901 Swamiji responded to Josephine: 'You are perfectly correct in saying that we will have to learn many things from Japan. The help that Japan will give us will be with great sympathy and respect, whereas that from the West unsympathetic and destructive. Certainly it is very desirable to establish a connection between India and Japan' (5.162).

Okakura arrived in India accompanied by Josephine MacLeod. They had left Shimonoseki on 5 December 1901 and arrived in Calcutta on 6 January 1902. Okakura met Swamiji on the same day, and Swamiji exclaimed: 'It seems as if a long lost brother has come.'¹² Okakura described in his letter to Oda Tokunou, a Buddhist celibate monk, that 'the master is truly a distinguished person bestowed with surpassing spirit and wisdom and everybody here venerates him'.¹³

Swamiji was extremely happy to meet Okakura and wrote to Sister Christine, who was staying at Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, that Okakura and Mr Hori, a brahmacharin, had come along with Josephine MacLeod to Belur. While Hori came to India to study Sanskrit and English, Okakura 'came to see India, the Motherland of Japanese culture and art'.¹⁴

Later, in the first week of February, Okakura and Swamiji went on a pilgrimage to Bodh Gaya. It was at Bodh Gaya that Siddhartha Gautama attained enlightenment and became Buddha. He later gave his first sermon at Sarnath and reset in motion the wheel of dharma. This pilgrimage is of historic importance, since the great revivalist of the Eastern spirit, Swamiji, was accompanied by the father of modern pan-Asianism, Okakura, to one of the most important places associated with Buddha, whose ideas have reverberated and united Asia for millennia.

Swamiji was in bad health and suffered from influenza. His plan to visit Japan could not be fulfilled. Though Swamiji left this world in July of the same year, his influence on Okakura can be seen in the sensational book *The Ideals of the East*. It was later published in 1903 from London. The very first words stirred Asians: 'Asia is one.'¹⁵ This is the highest possible non-dualistic concept of a geographical and cultural idea. The idea of Asian unity was clearly an important concept of Swamiji. Okakura sought to convince Asians to 'feel and revivify the dormant life of the old Asiatic unity' (97). The manuscript of the book was edited by Sister Nivedita.

Okakura also wrote *The Awakening of the East* in 1902, but it was published posthumously. This book too was heavily influenced by Swamiji and Sister Nivedita and was replete with explicit references to the worship of Kali. It is in this work that he exhorted Indians to fight against the British colonial government. It begins with 'Brothers and sisters of Asia!', almost a replication of Swamiji's 'Sisters and brothers of America' in Chicago. The



Yours respectfully
Okakura Kakuzo

book concludes: ‘The cowards shrink before the brilliant image of freedom. The cautious pause on the threshold of a great revolution. Do they prefer Death in Life to Life in Death? A crisis has now arrived in our history and the dread ordeal has to be faced.’¹⁶

It is seen that Okakura had already formulated his vision about the unity of Asia while Swamiji was alive. The concept of oneness traversed Asia to reach the Indian political shore in 1905 under the slogan ‘Bengal is One’ in the movement against the Partition of Bengal. Okakura, Nivedita, and Swami Vivekananda wove the warp and woof of Asian consciousness meticulously.

After the passing of Swamiji, Okakura met Tagore and left a lasting impression upon the latter, who became a lover of Japan and an ardent enthusiast for the Asian renaissance in the realm of art and culture. Tagore was also directly influenced by Swamiji, and in many of his writings during the Swadeshi movement, he exhorted his countrymen to read and know Swami Vivekananda in order to know the country.

But was Swamiji enamoured only with Japan and the Japanese? It was not so. If he would have lived longer, he would have appealed to China as well and hastened the national awakening brought about by another pan-Asianist: Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925).

Swamiji and China

Huang Xin Chuan, a professor of history at Beijing University and deputy director of the Institute of South Asian Studies, Beijing, wrote *Modern Indian Philosopher Vivekananda: A Study*. The book contains Swamiji’s views on China. Huang Xin Chuan delivered a speech on ‘Vivekananda and China’ at the Asiatic Society, Calcutta, on 4 January 1980 and asserted: ‘Vivekananda stands out as the

most renowned philosopher and social figure of India in modern China. His philosophical and social thought and epic patriotism not only inspired the growth of nationalist movement in India, but also made a great impact abroad. ... He made a prophecy that the Chinese culture will surely be resurrected one day like the “Phoenix” and undertake the responsibility of the great mission of integrating the Western and the Oriental cultures.¹⁷

Professor Huang explained that ‘when Vivekananda went to America for the first time, he hoped that country would achieve this [integrating] mission. But during his second visit abroad, he realised that he was deceived by dollar imperialism. He, therefore, came to the conclusion that America could not be an instrument to accomplish this task, but it was China which could do it’ (100). This might be the context for Swamiji’s growing interest in Japan and China. Professor Huang claims that Swamiji pinned his hopes on China.

Swamiji visited China only once. On his way to Chicago by ship, he spent three days there in June 1893. He saw Hong Kong and Canton—now called Guangzhou. He even managed to travel 80 miles up the Pearl River to Canton and visited one of the Chinese Buddhist temples. In a letter to Alasinga, Balaji, and his friends in Madras, he wrote about his first-hand experience in China. He was appalled by the poverty he saw and considered it to be the root cause of India’s and China’s problems. He wrote: ‘Their extreme poverty is one of the causes why the Chinese and the Indians have remained in a state of mummified civilization. To an ordinary Hindu or Chinese, everyday necessity is too hideous to allow him to think of anything else.¹⁸ But he could foresee that the downtrodden would rise within each nation and also internationally.

In March 1901 Swamiji went to East Bengal. He stayed at Mohini babu's villa at Farashganj, Dacca. Hemchandra Ghose recorded Swamiji's prophecy for Asia. It happened when Swamiji was met by young boys from Shyamakanta Parshnath's Gymnasium. He spoke prophetically: 'Yes, the Sudras of the world will rise. And that is the dictate of Social Dynamic that is *Sivam*. It is as clear as day-light that the entire Orient will have a resurrection to build anew a human world. Lo! the future greatness of China, and in the wake of it, of all the Asiatic nations. ... You take it from me, this rising of Sudra will take place first in *Russia* and then in *China*. *India* will rise next and will play a vital role in shaping the future world.'¹⁹ On another occasion Swamiji also said about China: 'I see before me the body of an elephant. There is a foal within. But it is a lion-cub that comes out of it. It will grow in future, and China shall become great and powerful.'²⁰

Swamiji was of the opinion that there was an ancient philosophical link between India and China: 'There is, the Swami says, distinct evidence of Vedanta's missionary enterprise [in China] long before the advent of Buddha' (2.132).

Asian Visionaries in India

Sister Nivedita was infused with the power of Swamiji. She had been instrumental in carrying forward Swamiji's unfinished mission of electrifying the Asian consciousness. Sitting at Swamiji's feet on board ship to England in 1899 she noted: 'I knew that here I was but the transmitter, but the bridge, between Him and countless host, of his own people, who would yet arise, and seek to make good his dreams.'²¹

Swamiji's Asiatic dream was transferred to multiple centres through her. Sri Aurobindo, Tagore, Coomaraswami, Okakura, Subhashchandra Bose—each of them were associated

with Sister Nivedita, who also died very young on 13 October 1911. Sri Aurobindo popularized the idea of 'Asia' through his editorials in the newspaper *Bande Mataram* and claimed to have direct spiritual communion with Swami Vivekananda while he was in the Alipur jail in 1908.²² Sri Aurobindo's close associate, Paul Richards, went to Japan and wrote *The Dawn over Asia* in 1920.

Ananda Kentish Coomaraswami wrote classics on Asian aesthetics and enunciated the 'Asiatic philosophy of art' underlying its essential 'unity in diversity'. He boosted the idea that India was the wellspring of all Asian civilizations. He tried to bring Hinduism and Buddhism closer, and Sister Nivedita coauthored with him works like *Myths of the Hindus and Buddhists* (1914) and *Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism* (1916).

The combined influence of Okakura and Coomaraswami over Tagore made the latter envision a resurgent spiritual Asia. The baton of the resurgent spiritual Asia passed from Swamiji to Okakura to Rabindranath Tagore.

Similarly, Benoy Sarkar (1887–1949), one of the greatest Indian scholars of the last century and author of a brilliant exposition on the material basis for the Asian unity, titled *Futurism of Young Asia* (1922), was directly involved with the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement and much inspired by Swamiji's 'śakti-yoga, energism, the vigour and strength of freedom'.²³ 'To put India, nay Asia, on an equal footing with the West was what he sincerely longed for. It was this that brought Benoy Sarkar close to the life and teachings of Vivekananda and made him an admirer of Vivekananda's activities to bring home due honour to his motherland'.²⁴

Subhashchandra Bose, who later participated in the Japanese vision of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, was a follower of Swami

Vivekananda throughout his life. He paid tribute to Swamiji with the following words: 'If he had been alive, I would have been at his feet. Modern Bengal is his creation—if I err not.'²⁵

With the passing of Tagore in 1941, the defeat of Japan in World War II, and the disappearance of Netaji Subhashchandra Bose, the pace of crystallization of Asian consciousness decelerated. The unity also suffered under the ideological bifurcation of Asia due to communism. With the end of the Cold War, the ongoing implosion of Western powers, and the reemergence of Asia to its preeminent position, Asia's siren song started to sound around the world. Swamiji, while presiding over a meeting at the Star Theatre in Calcutta at which Sister Nivedita delivered a lecture on 'The Influence of Indian Spiritual Thought in England' on 11 March 1898, commented: 'Mark you this—the most marvellous historical fact—that all the nations of the world have to sit down patiently at the feet of India to learn the eternal truths embodied in her literature. India dies not. China dies not. Japan dies not.'²⁶

It is true, Asia dies not. The mission of Swami Vivekananda was to build a spiritually vibrant, interconnected, and prosperous Asia. That was the eternal message from the missionary of the East for the East!



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'Ode to a Nightingale' in the Light of Vedanta

Sayan Bhattacharyya

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:
'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,
But being too happy in thine happiness,—
That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees,
In some melodious plot
Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,
Singest of summer in full-throated ease.

O for a draught of vintage! that hath been
Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth,
Tasting of Flora and the country green,
Dance, and Provençal song, and sunburnt
mirth!

O for a beaker full of the warm South,
Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
And purple-stained mouth;
That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,
And with thee fade away into the forest dim:

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
What thou among the leaves hast never known,
The weariness, the fever, and the fret
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,
Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin,
and dies;
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
And leaden-eyed despairs,
Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.

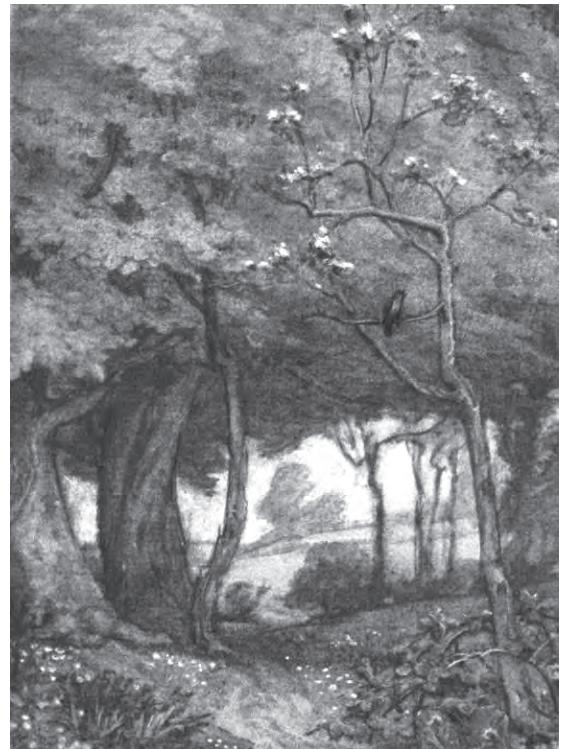


Illustration of the poem 'Ode to a Nightingale',
by W J Neatby (1899)

Away! away! for I will fly to thee,
Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,
But on the viewless wings of Poesy,
Though the dull brain perplexes and retards:
Already with thee! tender is the night,
And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,
Cluster'd around by all her starry Fays;
But here there is no light,
Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown
Through verdurous glooms and winding
mossy ways.

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,
But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet
Wherewith the seasonable month endows
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;
White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
Fast fading violets cover'd up in leaves;
And mid-May's eldest child,
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

Darkling I listen; and, for many a time
 I have been half in love with easeful Death,
 Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme,
 To take into the air my quiet breath;
 Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
 To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
 While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
 In such an ecstasy!
 Still wouldest thou sing, and I have ears in vain—
 To thy high requiem become a sod.

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
 No hungry generations tread thee down;
 The voice I hear this passing night was heard
 In ancient days by emperor and clown:
 Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
 Through the sad heart of Ruth, when,
 sick for home,
 She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
 The same that oft-times hath
 Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
 Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

Forlorn! the very word is like a bell
 To toll me back from thee to my sole self!
 Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well
 As she is fam'd to do, deceiving elf.
 Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades
 Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
 Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep
 In the next valley-glades:
 Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
 Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep?

John Keats (1819)

WHAT IS FREEDOM?—asking somebody this question can throw a person into a sea of definitions. Even after considering all the definitions a person can come to the conclusion that 'freedom' is a concept more likely to be realized subjectively than defined objectively. The multitude of definitions is as myriad as the various circumstances under which people come to realize what freedom actually is. From the theological point of view 'freedom'

can be translated as 'salvation'. In the present article an attempt has been made to look into John Keats's notion of freedom in his poem 'Ode to a Nightingale' and make an analysis of the same as 'salvation'. But before moving further, we should examine the meanings of these two words.

'Freedom' means the state of being free from any bondage or obligation. 'Salvation', on the other hand, is a spiritual term and is open to multiple interpretations. Different religious doctrines interpret the word differently. We shall strive to find out, later in this article, some of the possible meanings of the term from the different philosophical angles and shall also try to effect reconciliation among those varied elucidations. Let us now delve deep into Keats's quest for freedom in the 'Ode to a Nightingale' and see whether this freedom borders on salvation.

'Some Melodious Plot'

Although it is an ode, 'Ode to a Nightingale' does not begin with a conventional invocation. On the contrary, the beginning is abrupt and dramatic. It seems as though the poet has forgotten all about conventions and has suddenly plunged into his deeply felt emotions. Is this not a bit strange for the classical-minded John Keats, who probably cared more for conventions than anybody else during the Romantic Revival? Then, what is the reason behind this forgetfulness? Is it deliberate or spontaneous? Is it just an out of the way poetical décor or does it stem from something more serious? A few biographical details from the poet's life may prove relevant to answer these questions.

It is well-known to us that Keats's short lifespan was strewn with sorrowful events. He witnessed his brother's, Tom Keats, premature demise from tuberculosis. His love affair with Fanny Brawne did not materialize into anything fruitful. His poetic creations were also scathingly

criticized by the then popular London magazines. Some of the critics went to the extent of advising Keats to set aside his poetic aspirations and take up the profession of a cobbler. The sad incidents in his personal life, in conjunction with the adverse criticism of his poetry, afflicted such terrible wounds on Keats's inner psyche that he wanted to escape from his reality all the time. He fell upon 'the thorns of life' and bled severely. Gradually, he started retreating to his cosy cocoon of fantasy and deep contemplation. It was at that critical point that Keats heard the song of the nightingale. It was more than a song to him. It was the call for freedom. It was the call for which he had been waiting so eagerly. It was the call by responding to which, he believed, he would be able to liberate himself from the pin-pricks of earthly existence. To a distressed and dejected Keats, the nightingale appeared to be an independent spirit whose song seemed to allure him to a realm of everlasting joy. He, therefore, responded to the bird's song with a primal urgency, forgetting everything about conventions.

'Leave the World Unseen'

A sincere reading of the 'Ode to a Nightingale' reveals that one of the recurrent motifs in the poem is Keats's yearning to attain a release from physical consciousness. The immediate effect of the nightingale's song on the mind of the poet is that of an acute pain, which results from an inner conflict—a conflict between the awareness of the brutal realities of his own life, on the one hand, and his intense desire to cut himself loose from the clutches of that awareness, on the other. This pain gradually numbs his senses into oblivion, as if he is really under the influence of 'hemlock' or 'opiate'. Now, the question is, why does Keats choose hemlock and opium? Is there any specific reason for such a choice? It seems there is. What Keats immediately wants as a response to the song is a

complete freedom from consciousness, but not to merge with the bird. He wants to deny his own existence and sink into absolute nothingness. He thinks that the anaesthetic effect of hemlock and opium is perfectly suited to his cause. His choice, therefore, is absolutely logical, apart from being necessary. However, Keats's use of the phrase 'as though' in the second line of the first stanza is very suggestive. It shows that he is actually aware of the unreal nature of those substances. As a result of this illusion, only a partial release from consciousness is achieved—a hindrance in the path of the poet's attempt to self-effacement. Therefore, he starts afresh in the second stanza, this time a bit more conventionally.

Keats painfully realizes that a release from physical consciousness is practically unattainable without an effort to blend himself completely into something ethereal. It is only after knowing this that Keats is able to comprehend the true import of the bird. He comes to understand that the nightingale's song is not only a source of eternal joy for him, but that a merger with the bird is also his passport to freedom. Therefore, the poet wishes to blend himself into a oneness with the bird. In the second stanza Keats starts with a formal invocation seeking the inspiration of wine to retrieve that mood of trance from where he had already once fallen down on the crude surface of reality.

He does not say wine, he says 'vintage'. Again the question comes, why does he use the word 'vintage'? Is there any special purpose for that? Vintage, we should remember, is not only an excellent medium for Keats to go back to that dream-like state, but it also suggests 'ageing'. Human life, on the other hand, is subject to change and, therefore, to decay. He wishes to go beyond a state of flux and thinks, at least momentarily, that nothing can serve the purpose of a medium better than wine, which gets enriched

with the passage of time. He then uses the word 'vintage' to give the double meaning of 'excellence' and 'ageing'. He understands that he has to jeopardize his earthly existence if he wishes a complete merger with the bird. He realizes that he has to leave behind this mundane life in order to pass on to the eternal plane of existence, to which the bird belongs. This realization makes the poet only too happy. His death wish is apparent in the phrase 'deep-delved earth', which may be said to evoke a burial image. He wants to die into a new world by sacrificing his mortal life gladly. His desire for self-extinction, under the influence of 'vintage', becomes manifest when he says: 'That I might drink, and leave the world unseen, / And with thee fade away into the forest dim.' Sacrificing his mortal life means a freedom—for which he has been waiting so long—from earthly sorrows. He looks up to the bird as a pathfinder who would herald him to the plane of eternal freedom.

Salvation Defined

What kind of freedom is Keats speaking about here for which he is only too eager to 'leave the world unseen'? Is this freedom worth it? Herein, the concept of salvation becomes important. In theology 'salvation' means liberation of the human soul from earthly sufferings. John Keats was a Christian. Let us, at first, try to see what Christianity has to say about salvation. As far as the Christian philosophy is concerned, all men are sinners who repent for the mercy of the almighty God in order to avoid the horrors of damnation. The recognition of one's sins coupled with the wholehearted acceptance of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus is what a Christian calls 'repentance'. In this connection we are reminded of how Doctor Faustus longed for the vision of Christ's blood in the sky while repenting for his sins against God—see the last scene of Christopher

Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*. Winning God's mercy at the end of one's repentance is called 'salvation' in Christian theology. In Christianity, one repents and then waits. When the time comes, the almighty Father shows mercy on a person's soul and takes it back to heaven with him. This is how one is redeemed and attains salvation.

The Vedantic philosophy analyses the concept of salvation in a somewhat different way. It interprets salvation, moksha, as a kind of enlightenment. According to this doctrine, the world around us is an illusion, maya, which allures and gradually mesmerizes us with its charms and trifling earthly preoccupations. This illusion veils our vision and we fail to recognize the primordial integrity of our soul, the Atman, with the supreme Being, Paramatman, who is eternal and infinite and is also known as Nirakara Brahman, the formless God. Salvation is the knowledge that lifts up the mask of illusion from our eyes and guides our soul towards union or assimilation with the supreme Being. It is an emancipation of the human soul from the mesh of worldly activities, samsara. Swami Vivekananda is of the opinion that all persons are potentially divine, but eventually some fail to realize their inherent Divinity. The reason behind this failure is desire, which is the root cause of all sufferings and which nestles and nourishes the soul to distract it from its correct objective. Salvation is, therefore, the rudder that finally gives direction to the soul and guides it home for its ultimate rendezvous with the infinite Being.

Acharya Shankara, the famous ancient Hindu philosopher, prescribes some ways to attain salvation that may prove appropriate to analyse Keats's ode. According to him, one should have the ability to discern between the eternal, *nitya*, and the non-eternal, *anitya*. One should not have attachment to anything material, that is one should not have desires. One has to possess

equanimity and self-control. Apart from these, one should honestly feel a tremendous urge for liberation. It is by a combination of all these qualities that a person can attain salvation. Buddhist philosophy is somewhat analogous to Vedantic philosophy in that it accepts desire as the sole cause for suffering, and the cessation of desire takes us to the cessation of suffering. And cessation of suffering is nothing but salvation. In a nutshell, salvation can be interpreted both as the way and the goal, the means and the end.

'Fade far away, Dissolve'

Right from the beginning Keats is continuously seeking a release from consciousness. He tries the drugging effect of 'hemlock' and 'opiate' on his senses, which fails. In the second stanza he again seeks inspiration from 'vintage' to go to the leafy world of the nightingale. This attempt also fails. We come to know of this failure in the third stanza, when he bids adieu to the bird for the time being and falls sharply back on the rugged plane of reality. What motivates Keats to make yet another attempt for a merger with the bird? What does he think is special about its existence?

The third stanza begins with Keats's painful realization that the nightingale can, indeed, fly beyond the temporal to the eternal, to 'something afar from the sphere of our sorrow', whereas he cannot. For the poet, the nightingale belongs to an alternative plane of reality that is timeless and infinite and where everything is in a perfect stasis. It is what Vedanta terms *nitya*, the permanent. The bird, being a denizen of that world, is imperishable, and so is its song. In the preceding stanza we have seen that Keats wanted complete union with the bird under the inspirational influence of 'vintage'. As a medium it does not prove to be very effective in the long run because it is made from something material and worldly. Therefore, it evokes earthly pictures in Keats's

mind like 'Provençal song' and merry-making of the people under the bright southern sun. These images reveal the poet's intense desire to be a part of those enjoyments as a means of escape from suffering. This desire causes an illusion, maya, and binds the poet even more tightly to the material world, which by its nature is fleeting. Keats thinks that escaping into those virtual enjoyments or illusions can effectively liberate his soul, his Atman, from sorrows. But, how can wine, whose root is strongly tied to temporality, lead the poet to eternity? Hence, the sharp fall on the human plane of existence.

As a result of this abrupt and unexpected fall, Keats is again smothered by the awareness of suffering. The nightingale flies away while he is left all alone to suffer the pinpricks of worldly existence. With his extraordinary power of visualizations Keats can practically visualize the pathetic condition of humans in general. He sees that in this material world people just huddle up together and 'groan' with the pain of suffering. Here youth does not get a chance to bloom in full, youthful love does not materialize, and beauty perishes. Sorrowful events of Keats's personal life are obliquely hinted at in the third stanza. Everything is transient in this world. But because we are not free from desire, we wilfully like to forget the ephemeral nature of worldly things, and this is the illusion in which we live. We always try to lend permanence to this transience, fixity to this mutability; we always strive to convert the *anitya* into the *nitya*. This desire is the root cause of all suffering. This is the reason why Keats suffers. Out of this knowledge comes the realization that access into the timeless can be attained only by letting the human soul, the Atman, become free for its complete absorption with the larger cosmic soul, the self-luminous and infinite One, the Paramatman.

'I Will Fly to Thee'

This realization lends clarity to Keats's vision as he comes to comprehend that the means he has so far chosen for his passage to the immutable and the infinite are all rooted in the mutable and the finite. He, therefore, sets all other worldly things aside and takes refuge in his own imagination to be one with the bird. Keats, in the fourth stanza, flies to the eternal world of the nightingale 'on the viewless wings' of his imagination. He says: 'Already with thee!'

We now notice a mood of non-attachment in the poet. He seems to have drawn a clear line of demarcation between the *nitya* and the *anitya*. For the time being he can free himself from all mortal preoccupations and desires. In a deeply meditative mood he focuses fervently on his integration with the bird and its elevated plane of existence. In a moment of profound introspection and detachment Keats achieves a complete release from consciousness and merges with the nightingale, which is symbolic of the Paramatman. This merger, however, is only momentary. In his expanding vision of flux and eternity, Keats rejects the physicality of the bird with the intense power of his imagination and thinks of it as an integral part of the imperishable Nature. Being denied any material existence, the nightingale becomes an emblem of everlasting joy.

Thus, by getting an access into the timeless, though for a brief period, Keats feels the essence of existence. He has now become a 'living soul' who can 'see into the life of things'. He can see nothing with his physical eyes, but with the inner eye of imagination he can feel the Queen Moon sitting happily on her throne, surrounded by her 'starry Fays'. In the fifth stanza he says that he cannot see the little flowers by his feet, but he can tell by their fragrance that they are all full of honeydew. It is probably in a rare moment of illumination like this that Keats

would have listened to the unheard melodies played by a piper and have seen the undying passion of a pair of young lovers, all of whom were nothing but illustrations on a piece of ancient Greek art. Nevertheless, there is also the painful realization that this blissful mood is short-lived. The question is why is this mood ephemeral? We should remember that Keats has travelled to the world of the nightingale on the wings of his powerful imagination, which is, after all, a human faculty. Further, it should be remembered that he enjoys this assimilation with the Infinite, while his soul remains encaged within his finite physical body. He realizes that an irreversible absorption in the Infinite, the *nitya*, is impossible until he can break himself free from the prison house of the soul that is the human body. Keats's union with the eternal has got to be momentary. And it is by the excruciating awareness of the fleeting nature of the stasis he has achieved that he wishes earnestly to espouse death. He knows that it is only by embracing death that he can eternize this 'blessed mood'. And it is due to this realization that the poet gradually starts moving away from the bird—a departure that he tries very hard to stop, even if it costs him his own life. The death wish that was apparent towards the end of the second stanza becomes clearly manifest as we move on to the sixth stanza.

'In such an Ecstasy!'

The sixth stanza opens with an avid yearning for death on the part of the poet, who says that he has pleaded death repeatedly and passionately to take over his body. He thinks that if he can die now, he would never have to come back to the crude plane of reality. He feels that his death would perpetuate that 'blessed mood' he is in. Therefore, he craves: 'Now more than ever seems it rich to die.'

If he can pass away while the bird is ‘pouring forth’ its heart ‘in profuse strains of unpremeditated art’ then, he believes, he would be able to become an inseparable part of the Infinite, of the Eternal. But alongside this wish also comes the painful realization that his death would not allow him to enjoy the bird’s song anymore, by which he is now enamoured. He would, then, have ‘ears in vain’ and would ‘become a sod’. Then, should he be seeking salvation or should he take delight in the song?—this is the conflict. The fleeting nature of the stasis that Keats achieves eventually marks his separation from the bird. Therefore, in the seventh stanza, Keats addresses the nightingale as separate from himself. He realizes that the bird is immortal, while he is not. He says that the bird has delighted people with its song from time immemorial. In ancient days the ‘emperor’, his ‘clown’, and even Ruth—the Moabite woman in the Old Testament—had heard its song as the poet is hearing now. This proves the essential permanence of the bird and its song. The different characters of different ages that appear in the poem show the ephemeral nature of human existence. On the other hand, the presence of the bird and its song in all the ages reveal their enduring nature. The further the nightingale flies away from this mundane world, the more ‘forlorn’ the poet gets. He comes to realize that what he has experienced is actually a glimpse of Eternity, of the *nitya*.

As far as Vedantic philosophy is concerned, the passage of a person from *anitya* to *nitya* is called ‘salvation’, because this passage would merge one’s Atman with the Paramatman. What Keats wants is a complete merger of his soul with the indestructible and imperishable soul of nature. Keats is neither a sinner in the accepted sense of the term nor is he begging for the mercy of the almighty Father. What he yearns for is an absolute release from the limited consciousness

and a complete freedom from desires, which he achieves only partially. From this point of view, Keats’s idea of salvation is more akin to Vedantic philosophy than to Christianity. In the final stanza, as the nightingale flies away, the poet comes out of his trance. As the song fades far away in the distance, the poet falls back sharply on the worldly plane of existence. He comes out of his trance a transformed and wise man. Keats has fallen in love with death to attain salvation, but now he realizes that had he died, he would not have been able to enjoy the beauty of the nightingale’s song.

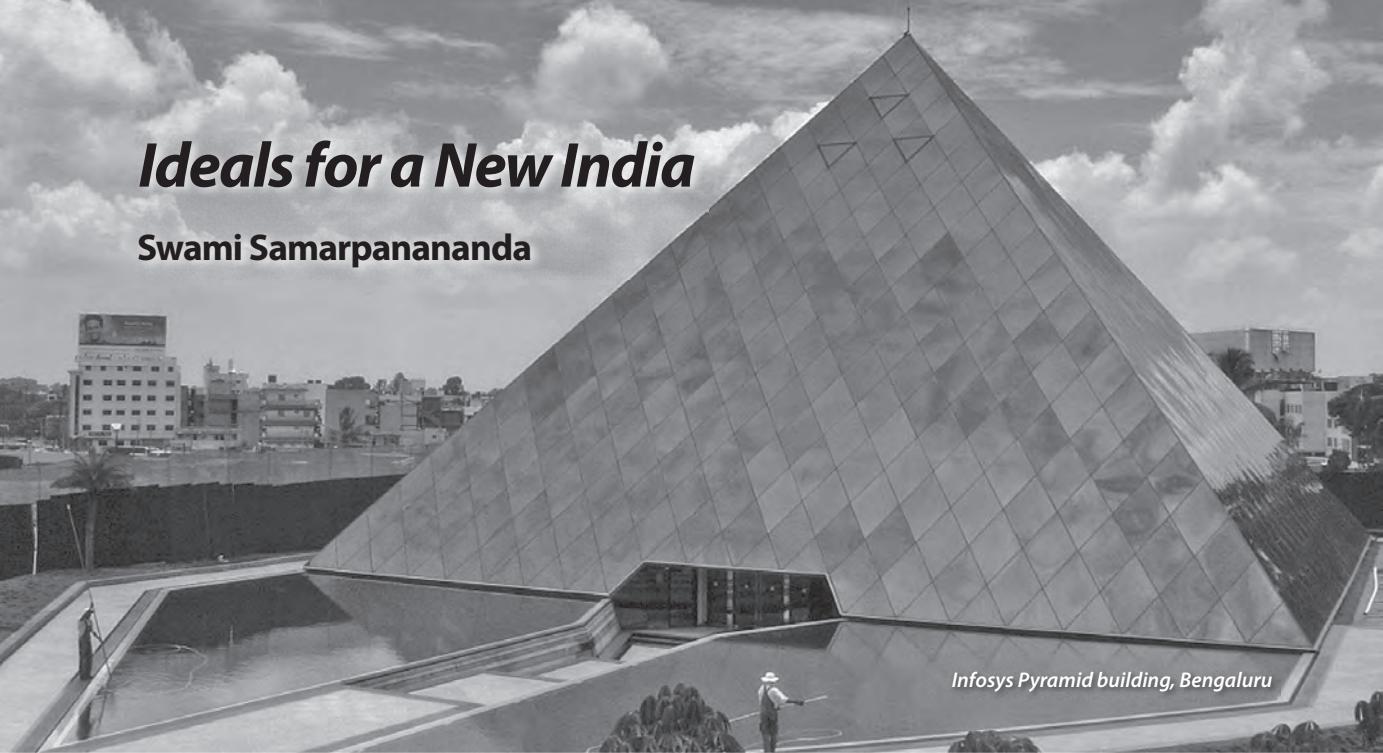
‘Ode to a Nightingale’ ends with a series of unresolved questions: Was the poet dreaming or did he get a fleeting glimpse of eternity? Did the poet fall asleep at the end or did he wake up into a new consciousness? Was the poet willing to die to achieve immortality or was he more eager to live on to take delight in the bird’s song? Was the poet happy with his realization of the essence of human existence or did he feel sad over the fading away of the ‘plaintive anthem’? Even with all these questions remaining unanswered, the intense psychic drama that unfolds, slowly culminating into a final uncertainty, lends a rare charm to the ode, thereby validating Keats’s own idea that ‘a thing of beauty is a joy forever’. ☙

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Ideals for a New India

Swami Samarpanananda



Infosys Pyramid building, Bengaluru

WHILE SPEAKING OF the ideals of Indian women Swami Vivekananda told a gathering of US citizens in 1894: ‘The widows of high caste in India do not marry, he said; only the widows of low caste may marry, may eat, drink, dance, have as many husbands as they choose, divorce them all, in short enjoy all the benefits of the highest society in this country.’¹ The gathering erupted in an appreciative laughter.

More than a century has passed since Swamiji laid out his opinion about Indian women. Things have changed regarding remarriage and divorce in India. Today the emphasis is upon educating and protecting the girl child, so that women may have ample opportunities to improve themselves. And, in fact, they are found in every social, economic, and cultural field, even in the armed forces. Indian women are now free to do all that the people in the ‘high society’ of many countries do. This makes one curious to know how things have been evolving in the so-called progressive India.

Yesterday and Today

India has slowly succeeded in shedding thousands of social, cultural, religious, and other shackles since its independence from foreign dominion in 1947. Today empowerment laws such as Right to Education and Right to Information have given immense power to the masses. Huge strides in the fields of science and technology are being recognized. Economic liberalization, green revolution, white revolution, and many other such advances have brought smiles to countless Indians. But there is another side of the picture: ‘India has earned the dubious distinction of being the country where maximum number of murders takes place in the world, three times more than its neighbour Pakistan and double the figures in United States.’²

If one reads the figures given annually by the National Crime Records Bureau³ of murders, suicides, rapes, and other crimes, one wonders if we are living in a sane country. There is also the disturbing data concerning molestations and abuse of women and children. In addition, ‘around

75,000 children out of those missing in the last three years in the country remain untraced.⁴ Is this the India about which Romain Rolland said: ‘If there is one place on the face of earth where all the dreams of living men have found a home from the very earliest days when man began the dream of existence, it is India?’⁵

India was ranked 94 out of 176 countries by Transparency International’s 2012 Corruption Perception Index released in December 2012.⁶ And this is the land where Chanakya, the great minister of the emperor Chandragupta, was said to be so honest that he used different oil lamps for his official and personal use, himself bearing the expenses for the latter.

The BBC reported on 20 March 2013 that ‘more than 1,600 students have been expelled for cheating in school examinations in the northern Indian state of Bihar, officials say.’⁷ And this is the same India that taught the decimal system to the world, gave the idea of algebra, and contributed hugely to geometry and astronomy; the India that created the first university in the world at Takshashila, or Taxila, now in Pakistan, attended by more than 10,000 students.

Will Durant, the great world historian, writes: ‘India was the motherland of our race and Sanskrit the mother of Europe’s Languages. She was the mother of our philosophy, the mother through the Arabs of much of our mathematics, mother through Buddha of the ideals embodied in Christianity. Mother through the Village Communities of self-government and democracy. Mother India is in many ways, the mother of us all.’⁸ And today’s India feels ashamed to speak in its mother tongue and raises slogan when education boards want children to learn Sanskrit.

There can be no doubt that Indians love their motherland. A few exceptions here or there do not alter this fact. And yet India seems to be

bleeding from every part of the body. Unscrupulous elements, both indigenous and imported, seem to be tearing the country limb by limb, giving it a hideous look or at best a sense of patchy development.

The Ailment and Its Remedy

The amygdala is an almond-shaped part of the brain located deep in the medial temporal lobe and forms part of the limbic system. It is known to play an important role in processing emotions. This subcortical brain structure is linked to fear responses and pleasure. It is also correlated with aggressive behaviour and sexuality. Till an organism is completely controlled by the amygdala, it cannot really be called a higher organism. For such organisms, survival is the only thing that matters.

According to Hindu psychology, *abhinive-sha*, fear of death, *raga*, attraction, and *dvesha*, repulsion, are the basic survival factors in all living beings. Real human evolution begins only after we learn to overcome these predominantly animal instincts. These purely survival instincts are the cause of emotional storms in evolved minds. To counter these storms one needs the stability offered by the neocortex, which is six-layered and sits on top of the cerebral hemispheres. The neocortex, found in mammals, is involved in higher functions such as perception, generation of motor commands, spatial reasoning, conscious thought, and, in humans, language. The better the neocortex, the better the stability.

The second sign of evolution and safe anchorage appears in mammals that live in a family. It means that such mammals share food with family members, and in crisis a member may sacrifice itself to save others. Higher than family identification is the tribal identity, in which a member identifies with the village or tribe. Traditionally

Indians have been even higher than this too by identifying themselves with their sub-caste, which began as professional guilds. The great law giver Manu further broadened this and made people identify with varna, caste, which were only four in number throughout the country. The concept of varna, found in the Vedas and elaborated in the Bhagavadgita, was codified in the Smritis. The concept of varna led to the concept of varna-ashrama dharma, which in turn led to the concept of *svadharma*, one's dharma.

Svadharma is defined as a set of duties comprising varna dharma, general caste duties; ashrama dharma, duties related to station of life; *nimitta* dharma, penances and the like; *guna* dharma, duties born of a particular position, for instance that of a king; and *samanya* dharma, duties common to all. In general these laws regulated national, communal, family, as well as *vishesha*, particular, individual obligations.

The centre of existence for an individual progressively widened from one's amygdala-driven petty self, and instead of having thousands of smaller groups, people in India had four broad groups to identify with. As they were beginning to settle in small groups engaging with different occupations, this system brought a lot of integration and cohesiveness. Human society is by nature divided, so integration releases the energies of a vast number of people. Whether the system was good or not is not the question, what is important is that this system helped India survive for thousands of years, while other great civilizations perished.

In addition to *svadharma*, every person had one or more of the four *purusharthas*, personal goals—dharma, *artha*, kama, and moksha. Thus, the ideal for an Indian was a combination of *purusharthas* and *svadharma*.

With the passing of time all these centres of social cohesiveness got distorted. The Indian

Constitution has done away with the caste system, growth of technology has done away with the sub-caste system, and the current economic and social life has taken away the family system. Old values stand eroded and the ideals set by the ancients have been compromised permanently, leaving Indians disoriented. Those ideals have been replaced by the norms of obedience to wealth and power and disinclination to follow old codes of conduct. This situation has made the new generation of Indians rootless, without ideals, uncivil, immoral, and cruel.

On the personal front varna-ashrama dharma and the concept of *purusharthas* has become passé. It is impossible to try to turn the clock back. It is known that without proper ideals to guide oneself, there is no hope of evolving individually, and the same can be said of society. A person's character is formed by his or her ideals.

What India needs today is a transformed set of concrete ideals that can make the individual and society in general evolve according to the trend of the world and yet not be totally cut away from the past, from the roots.

Four Ideals

Taking into account the words of past masters, the present situation, and the future growth, we suggest four upgraded ideals for India to follow.

Vidya • Involves the dedication of oneself to one or more branches of knowledge and the endeavour to excel in that or those fields. The field of knowledge can be anything, starting from the art of cleaning to the study of the most abstruse subjects. The crux lies in excelling in that area of knowledge. In the *Katha Upanishad* Nachiketa tells himself: 'Among many I rank as belonging to the highest; among many I rank as belonging to the middling.' And Acharya Shankara in his commentary, adds: 'But never do I behave as the worst.'

Sampada · Refers to the production of wealth for the nation through business or other means with an honest attitude. The vaishyas of earlier times were dedicated to making money, but unlike today's moneymakers, their goal was not to hoard money but to regulate it in society. India has always treated wealth as a goddess. That is why they never wasted money or earned it through dishonest or harmful ways. Keeping this in mind, one should strive to save money by frugality, by avoiding wastage, and, at the same time, by taking care of the cleanliness of means. This is the way of creating healthy wealth.

Seva · For those who do not feel inclined to study or produce clean wealth, service is the most suitable ideal. This can be done by treating every Indian as a brother and a sister and by serving them with sincerity, commitment, and dedication. Swamiji said: 'Be proud that you are an Indian, and proudly proclaim, "I am an Indian, every Indian is my brother." Say, "The ignorant Indian, the poor and destitute Indian, the Brahmin Indian, the Pariah Indian, is my brother." ... "The soil of India is my highest heaven, the good of India is my good."¹⁰ For most ordinary minds this is the best ideal. Imagine a physics scientist who feels that he cannot excel as a scientist, nor can he produce considerable wealth for the nation; he can do a little of both by dedicating himself to the service of the nation through taking special care of his students, who are the future citizens of the country. In fact, every doctor, government employee, teacher, businessperson, service-sector employee, anyone, would do good to himself or herself by practising some seva. It does not require any special effort. It only requires a change of attitude.

Tyaga · India is the land of *brahma-vidya*, knowledge of Brahman, the ultimate goal of life. So, there will always be people dedicated completely to God. It is imperative for them to be

firmly established in complete *tyaga*, renunciation, irrespective of the sadhana they undertake. Of course householders can always internalize the concept of *tyaga* and follow it according to their specific circumstances. This is what Sri Ramakrishna taught as the best means of living in the world with devotion to God.

These ideals are not really difficult to practise. One only needs to have willingness to go ahead with them. These ideals are dynamic in nature and are in consonance with the scriptures. They replace the *purusharthas* of the past and also redefine varna-ashrama dharma and *svadharma*. One can focus on a single ideal, which is the best way for growing, or take up a combination of two or more of them. India needs souls who can work as free agents, not only in the ambit of their own family, but anywhere where there is a need to uplift people. This is the best way to bring a sense of fulfilment to oneself and glory to society and the world.



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An Imaginary Interview with Sri Ramakrishna

Swami Chetanananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

REPORTER: Sir, nowadays some intellectuals are writing books based on your philosophy. There is no dearth of philosophers in India who have been debating and arguing about philosophical ideas over centuries. Some think that you are a dualist, some say a qualified non-dualist, and some believe that you are a non-dualist. There is so much confusion about your philosophy. We will be benefitted if you throw some light on this issue.

Ramakrishna: I see that you have raised a very sensitive issue. Look, I practised sadhanas of various sects of Hinduism, and then I practised Christianity and Islam, and I realized God in all those paths. Finally, I declared: 'As many faiths, so many paths'. I tell people not to fight or quarrel about religion. If you sincerely follow your path and love God, you will attain him. This is the view of the Bhagavadgita as well.

You see, I enjoy various kinds of dishes—soups, pickles, hot curry, and fried stuff. I love to play a flute with seven holes, as this creates various ragas and *raginis* (melodies). I do not like the bagpipe's 'pooooo' monotone like those who think of God in only one way. Sometimes I say, 'Ma, Ma, Kali, Kali'; sometimes, 'Krishna-Krishna, Ram-Ram, Shiva-Shiva, Jesus-Jesus, Allah-Allah, Gaur-Gaur.' I don't care for dogmatic views about God or monotonous ideas. All gods and goddesses of all religions are my relatives, so I have a large spiritual family. I can joyfully communicate with the people of all

religions. I told my disciples to follow this principle: 'As long as I live, so long do I learn.' I am the meeting point of all faiths, all paths, all yogas, all philosophies, and all doctrines. If someone tries to establish a single school based on my religious thought, that person will be an object of ridicule.

There is a controversy about God: whether he is formless or with form. I explained this mystery to Mahendranath and others by citing the example of water and ice, which are non-different. God is with form and again formless. Through the cooling influence of bhakti one sees the forms of God in the ocean of the Absolute. But when the sun of knowledge rises, the ice melts, and it becomes the same water it was before. I told this to the Brahmos many times because they only believed that God is formless.

You see, my disciple Narendra joined the Brahmo Samaj and did not believe in Mother Kali. Not only that, he used to criticize my Divine Mother. He used to consider my vision of Kali to be a hallucination. One day I angrily told him: 'You criticize and ridicule my Mother. Don't come here anymore.' He only smiled and prepared my smoke. He had deep love for me. Then his father passed away and he was in a dire state of poverty. He could not get a job. One day he came to me and said: 'Sir, I can't bear the starvation of my mother, sisters, and brothers. I know Mother Kali answers your prayer. Why don't you pray for me?' I told him: 'You don't

believe in my Mother and that is why you have all this trouble.' 'I don't know your Mother, sir,' he said. Seeing his pitiable condition, I said: 'All right, today is an auspicious day. In the evening go to the Kali temple and she will give you whatever you will ask for.' He went to the temple and prayed: 'Mother, give me knowledge, devotion, discrimination, renunciation, and your uninterrupted vision.' He prayed for only those five things and could not ask for money. I sent him to the temple two more times, but he could not ask for money. You see, he is a great soul. He was not born to lead a worldly life like others. Finally, when he fell at my feet and requested me to do something for his family, I told him: 'Your family will not suffer from plain food and plain clothing.' I also taught him a song to Kali, 'Ma Tvam hi Tara'; he sang that song the whole night and finally fell asleep on my floor.

I knew Narendra would carry my message of universal religion to the world. My view is: God is both with form and without form. I don't care for narrow, bigoted, and one-sided views about God. Blind people touch different parts of an elephant and express their respective views. In the same way, different religious sects grow and argue over their views because they have not seen the whole elephant. I showed Narendra the whole elephant so that he would not be able to form any narrow sect. I emphatically told him: 'Do not limit God. He is infinite.' He then proclaimed this universal religion all over the world, sooner or later all religions of the world will be harmonized under this one principle. You see, religions are paths, and not God.

You were saying something about my philosophy. Look, I have not studied the scriptures, but I heard many of them. Later I made a garland of those scriptures, put it around my neck, and danced. My Divine Mother made me realize the wisdom of those scriptures. My disciple Harinath (Swami Turiyananda) was versed in the scriptures and wrote a letter about my philosophy on 18 April 1919 to Swami Sharvananda.² He raised a host of different views of various schools of philosophy, such as Gaudapada's doctrine of no creation, Acharya Shankara's doctrine of superimposition, Ramanuja's doctrine of transformation, and Sri Kantha's doctrine of Shiva-dvaita. These philosophers expressed their views according to their understanding. Finally, Harinath wrote: 'Sri Ramakrishna's philosophy



therefore is: In whatever way and at any cost we must attain God. The Master said, "Tie the non-dual knowledge in the corner of your cloth and then do as you please." This means: Once you attain him, it does not matter which doctrine your temperament bids you to uphold.' (213).

I forgot to tell you one thing: One day Keshab Sen requested me to speak on *nirakara*, the formless God. I uttered three times 'nirakara, nirakara, nirakara,' and went into samadhi. I tried to make him understand that *nirakara* is beyond the mind and the speech. One cannot give a lecture on that subject. I am a dualist, a qualified non-dualist, a non-dualist, and again I am beyond all those doctrines. God is unique, devoid of duality and non-duality. The rascal who tries to bind me to any particular doctrine is a fool.

Reporter: Sir, although the Brahmos did not believe in the gods and goddesses of the Hindus, it was Keshab who first preached about you and made you known to society. Moreover, most of your disciples were connected with the Brahmo Samaj.

Ramakrishna: You are right. Keshab recognized my divinity and wrote about my life and teachings in his various papers and journals. I first thought that Vaishnavcharan would spread my message, as he was a sadhaka and pandit. But Keshab was so impressed, observing my samadhi and listening to my teachings, that he would often come to me with his group. I also visited them in Keshab's house and at their temples. There was a commotion in Calcutta when the Brahmos wrote about me in the *Indian Mirror*, *Sulabh Samachar*, and *New Dispensation*. You can ask your readers to read those stories in *Samasamayik Drishtite Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa*.

Narendra, Rakhal, Shashi, Sharat, Yogin, Ram, Manomohan, Girish, and others came to

know about me by reading those journals of the Brahmo Samaj. Keshab also introduced many of my ideas in his New Dispensation, such as the motherhood of God, devotional singing, and so on. Later, one day Keshab took me to his meditation room and worshipped my feet with flowers and sandal paste.

I was very fond of Shivanath (a Brahmo leader), but later he cut off connection with me because he noticed that I would mix with drunkards and fallen people and give them spiritual instructions. Look, Narada and Shukadeva will not come to me for spiritual instructions because they are ever-free. There is no glory in making a good man good; but it is something if one can transform the life of a drunkard or a fallen person. He is truly a real sadhu, a redeemer of the fallen, and a changer of people's destiny, who can transform others' lives.

Reporter: Sir, perhaps you are aware that in 1982, when the copyright of M's *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* expired, there was an explosion in the sales of that book, because several publishers published it simultaneously and offered it to the public at cheaper prices. In fact, there was a mob scene in the book market on College Street. Thousands and thousands of copies were sold, and thus your message reached almost all Bengali homes.

Ramakrishna: Don't talk about the Bengalies; they are very emotional and sentimental, and their excitement fluctuates like the foam of boiling milk. Most of them buy the *Kathamrita* to keep it in their bookcases. How many actually read it? Nowadays I see that non-Bengalis and foreigners are studying my life and message seriously. You are talking about the Bengalies! Listen, they used to call me *pagla baman*; mad brahmana. Then, when Max Müller, Romain Rolland, Christopher Isherwood, Aldous Huxley, and Gerald Heard praised my life and

message, the Bengalis began to give me a little importance and appreciation.

Reporter: Sir, you are praising only the Western writers, but many Indian writers wrote books on you, composed songs and poems, and some playwrights wrote dramas on you.

Ramakrishna: Well, they write books on me just to earn money and fame, because I am popular in the market. But I tell you one thing: no one will be able to write a novel on me. The main theme of a novel is the amorous relationship between a man and a woman. But the smell of lust could not even come near my character. A Western writer tried to write a novel on me, but could not succeed. How could he? He could not connect any woman's character with my life. I worshipped my wife and made her a goddess. I told her: 'You, my biological mother (Chandramani Devi) in the *nahabat*, and Mother Kali in the temple are the same to me. I see all women as my Divine Mother, and I am her son.'

Let me tell you my secret: I destroyed all lust and infatuation for women through the mantra '*kamini-kanchan maya*; woman and gold are maya'. I uprooted greed for money with the mantra '*taka mati, mati taka*; money is earth, earth is money'. I wiped out the morbid desire for name and fame with the mantra '*nam-jash hyak-thu*; name and fame are spittle'.

You see, Mathur engaged Lakshmi Bai, the famous courtesan of Calcutta, to test my character. But the moment I saw her, I cried out 'Ma, Ma' and went into samadhi. She realized that it would be a great sin to tempt a holy man. She scolded Mathur for bringing a holy man to her. Embarrassed, Mathur hurriedly brought me back to Dakshineswar in his phaeton. I have never enjoyed a woman even in a dream. If a woman touches me, I fall ill. That part of my body aches as if stung by a horned fish.

Lakshminarayan offered 10,000 rupees to me; I refused his offer and asked him not to see me again. The greedy Kali temple officials considered me crazy to the extreme.

People in this world are hankering after name and fame. Mathur looked after me like his Chosen Deity and said: 'Father, inside and outside you is nothing but God.' Name and fame did not affect me at all.

Nowadays books about me sell very well in the market. So modern writers are writing all sorts of books about me, exaggerating what I say. They want to make money and they want name and fame. These two books about me are the authentic ones: *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* by Mahendranath Gupta (M) and *Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga* by Swami Saradananda.

Look, these were the first publications about me: Rajagopalachari wrote the *Sri Ramakrishna Upanishad*; Ramendra Sundar Bhattacharya wrote the *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Bhagavatam*; Ottur Nambudripad wrote the *Sri Ramakrishna Karnamritam*; Akshay Kumar Sen wrote the *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Punthi*; and Sharat Chakravarty wrote the *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Panchali*. Afterwards people will write the *Ramakrishna Gita*, *Ramakrishna Purana*, *Ramakrishna Sutra*, *Ramakrishna Shata Nama*, *Ramakrishna Sahasra Nama*, and so on.

In the 1950–60s there were several Bengali movies produced on me, such as *Yugadevata*, *Pagla Thakur*, and *Sri Ramakrishna*.

This is only the beginning. Wait for some more years. My life and message will spread all over the world. And as I had prophesied, my picture will be worshipped everywhere.



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Eternal Words

Swami Adbhutananda

Compiled by Swami Siddhananda; translated by Swami Sarvadevananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

WHEN SHUKADEVA attained *brahma-jnana*, knowledge of Brahman, he became carefree; all of his delusions of fame and prestige were shattered and then disappeared. He began to see the world as saturated with Brahman. Shukadeva is the ideal of all monks; he is the greatest of all of the knowers of Brahman.

When, by the grace of the guru, you are able to understand the essence of the scriptures and when, by his grace, you have your experience, you will be able to see directly that all of this fame and prestige are hollow and false. You have yourself experienced how those whom people worship today they revile tomorrow, openly insulting them in public. What is the value of such praise? You sacrifice yourself for others. You work hard and they worship you. But should you make the slightest misstep while toiling for them, they will then and there revile you. This is the nature of human beings. That is why great souls pay no heed to fame or honour; they have not the least reliance on a person's worship. They go on working selflessly. Their attention is focused on God, not on worldly praise. They know that those who worship them today will revile them tomorrow if they make the slightest mistake. When people worship them and offer great honour, great souls become fearful that if their egos puff up they will not be able to help humankind. It will also bring them harm. Moreover, to the extent people worship them, if perchance some big mistake is committed, people will revile them with equal measure. Such persons are also humans and

mistakes are natural. For those who do greater work, even greater mistakes may occur. This can be understood easily if one looks at the lives of great souls. But if one focuses only on one's possible mistakes, one cannot do any work. For that reason, the best practice is to perform work without any desire, focusing attention on God alone.

Please remember the compassion of Kamblji Baba.¹ By his grace the sadhus of Rishikesh are now able to take God's name without worry. There was previously no opportunity for obtaining alms at Rishikesh. Though the sadhus had a longing to live there, they could not do so owing to the lack of alms. That suffering was eradicated only by the grace of Kamblji Baba; for that reason all of you are now able to take the name of God there. In Rishikesh Swamiji met Kamblji Baba. Swamiji would praise him immensely. Kamblji Baba was a genuine renunciate and an honest worker.

It is the nature of the Chataka bird to drink no water other than rain water. Likewise, a genuine sadhu desires no love from anyone but God. They do not get charmed by the beauty of any other thing; being absorbed, they only behold God's infinite beauty. Oh my child, if the manifestation of a glimmer of that beauty is so great, can those who have seen that beauty be charmed by any other thing?

Wife, son, father, mother, kingdom—none of these could charm Buddha. No one's love or affection could bind him. He did not forget the goal of his life under any circumstances. He

loved everyone in this universe—those suffering from old age, birth, and pain of death. He dove deep into the majesty of Truth.

Merely by wearing the ochre cloth can one become a sadhu, my dear? Those whose hearts weep for God and for others are sadhus in the truest sense. It is very difficult to be a sadhu. Those who are sadhus do not even think of themselves; they don't care for their own suffering. If they come to know even a little bit about another's suffering, they try to remove that affliction to the best of their ability. And if they have no other means of helping, they will cry out in prayer to God. A sadhu prays to God for the welfare of all people and asks for the removal of their suffering. We have seen Swamiji express his pain and pray for the welfare of all. He would weep a flood of tears. What a state of mind that is! How can you understand? There was no outward show of sympathy or cry. We have seen before our own eyes how he used to feel their sufferings in the depth of his heart. After many hardships, returning from America, he established this Math. Immediately after doing so a famine broke out in Rajputana; Swamiji appealed for money for relief purposes, but no money was coming. Then he said: 'If money does not reach us by such and such a date, I shall sell this Math. We are sadhus. Our place is under the tree; let us again go and live under the tree.' See, what a state of affairs! Just now the Math is established with so much hardship, yet seeing the suffering of others he could not restrain himself. He was willing to sell the Math to remove even a bit of their suffering. What intense anxiety and concern for all these sufferers he had. You cannot comprehend it even in your imagination!

Every avatara and everyone who has become a sadhu has revered Shukadeva. Shukadeva is the greatest among the *paramahamsas*. Such a life is not commonly seen. He bestowed fearlessness to all beings.

If you can give money and similar things to others, they will mightily praise you. They will say: 'It is as if compassion itself has taken a human form and stands before us,' or 'such a person is rarely born,' or 'he is not a man, but a god,' and many similar statements. On the other hand, should you stop giving things to them, you will be considered a rogue. This is the natural tendency and character of people. For this reason, honest persons pay no heed to the praise or blame of others. They never abandon Truth; whether someone calls them good or bad, they pay no heed to that. While doing work that may please others, they never abandon righteousness. They crave no praise from persons. Their sole concern is to remain blameless before God and themselves.

Consider the lives of Maharshi Devendranath Tagore, Keshab Sen, and Ishvarchandra Vidyasagar. Devendranath Tagore was a kingly man, but going to the mountains he did sadhana in order to realize God. This is no ordinary thing. The Master told him: 'You are the Janaka of the Kali Yuga.' Nowadays, it is rare to see a charitable person like Ishvarchandra Vidyasagar. There is no other dharma higher than charity in this Kali Yuga—Vidyasagar observed that very dharma. Keshab Sen returned from England after causing a sensation. He would become intoxicated while talking about God. He was born with great dharmaic strength. Shivanath Shastri spent his life calling upon God. All of them were ideal persons and each has manifested his powers in a particular way. The difference is only in manifestation.

'S' gave you the vows of brahmacharya; this is a matter of great fortune. A brahmachari should eat food cooked by himself. While he was a brahmachari, our Hari Maharaj [Swami Turiyananda] ate food cooked by himself for twelve years. He then became a sannyasin. I used to eat with him often. None amongst us did such severe austerities like him. Call upon God wholeheartedly.

Lead a pure life. Wearing the garb of a sadhu, don't deceive people. If you remain pure, some day or another his grace will surely dawn.

Suggestions for Sadhana

By the 'yoga of practice' evil tendencies are destroyed. Will the bad habits accumulated over so many days leave you by mere thinking? You people lack strength of mind. That is why you will have to engage in the yoga of practice. Constant discernment will result in the cessation of evil tendencies. Before starting any work, discern. Discernment is essential. If one fails to engage in analysis, the power to discern does not even sprout. The person lacking discernment lives like an animal. Through discernment alone can one know Truth from untruth and recognize the play of maya. Only when discernment manifests may one gain release from the clutches of maya. For one who lacks discernment, maya grips him in delusion. That is why it is essential to learn the yoga of practice.

Do dhyana and japa sitting on the banks of the Ganga. It is a fine place; the mind quickly settles on the Ishta [Chosen Deity]. That is why the sadhus so dearly love the banks of the Ganga. One's body and mind become pure by doing dhyana and japa on the banks of the Ganga. God can quickly be realized. Bathing in the Ganga, drinking Ganga water, living on its banks, such things do not occur without his grace. For one who receives that benefit, know for certain that he has attained good karma.

One does not perform any sadhana and yet goes on complaining ceaselessly. Morning and evening are the most propitious times for dhyana and japa. One who has an attraction for a particular divine name, whose mind becomes fixed on a particular image, and who feels tremendous faith should repeat that name and meditate on that form. Do such spiritual practices. By doing

japa and dhyana the senses become restrained and lust, anger, and greed are controlled. Will it happen suddenly? One must do sadhana. Why do you gasp so much seeing that your mind refuses to become calm? The mind will become calm by the yoga of practice. You want to gain everything without doing any sadhana. My dear, can that happen? All avatars and great souls have shown by their own sadhana that everyone must do sadhana; then it will happen. If you want to meditate on the form of Sri Durga, the form that exists in the image, think and meditate on that form with a one-pointed mind.

If one can master one's mind, one becomes Godlike. The mind is constantly running; it is restless all the time. There is no other scoundrel like the mind. Arjuna said to Sri Krishna: 'My friend, my mind is not in control.' Sri Krishna admitted that the mind is indeed a scoundrel. Moreover, he said: 'Oh Arjuna, the mind will become settled by constant practice.' As much as the mind runs towards the objects of the senses, that much one must catch it and drag it back to God. The mind will become calm if one continues to perform this type of practice. Do not think of anything except God; only then lust, greed, and other enemies will be automatically conquered. When these enemies are conquered and the mind is settled, that very God whose eternal nature is Truth will manifest. Until the mind is settled, God will not manifest himself.

When all desires in the mind are renounced, it moves towards Brahman. If the mind moves towards Brahman, the ego consciousness goes. By continuously practising detachment, desires depart.

Brahmacharya means *brahma-shakti*, the power of Brahman. God cannot be known without brahmacharya. Lacking the power of comprehension, by what means will you know? Those who rightly observe celibacy grow in the power

of understanding. If one gains the power of comprehension, one can know and realize God.

By looking at their eyes and listening to their conversations, I can understand those who rightly engage in spiritual and devotional practices. For this reason I ask them to come again. I feel joyous while talking about God with them and also by feeding them. Do spiritual and devotional practices with the utmost earnestness. It is good to eat less at night. The noon meal should be more filling. Do not let attachment develop for the body. Rather, protect the body for God realization.

Japa brings perfection and fulfilment, this is certainly true. When japa becomes very absorbing, meditation and holding the mind become spontaneous. Like an unbroken stream of oil, japa flows incessantly. Then the external japa comes to an end; japa continues within. At the end of japa one should make an attempt to perform *dharana*, concentration, and *dhyana*. By this means *dhyana* becomes steady and the capacity to hold the mind increases.

The real truth is that japa can lead to perfection. Sri Chaitanya said this long ago. If japa is done perfectly, without a doubt *dhyana* becomes spontaneous. At that point *dhyana* flows like an unbroken stream of oil, external japa ceases and one is able to comprehend the Truth. That is why at the end of japa one should give a little more time to the practice of *dhyana*—by that means *dhyana* becomes steady.

'I am here, my Ishta is here; there is no one else in this world.' This is what *dhyana* is. By continuous practice, when the mind becomes pure, this attitude becomes firmly established. Only then does proper *dhyana* occur.

So what if one has taken a mantra? One nevertheless needs to do sadhana. One cannot achieve everything merely by receiving the mantra; one must perform sadhana—severe

sadhana. One should perform sadhana exactly as the guru has instructed and with full faith. One should not give up just because nothing is happening. One should remain engaged. Progress will surely happen if one holds fast to such a single-pointed practice.

You weep. I know that. Be pure. Then you will be able to understand everything. Pray to him. Crave for the strength to develop purity. Everything will happen by his grace. Unless he bestows the power, no one can become pure. Purity, purity—chant this mantra.

Death has no consideration for time or space. It heeds no impediments. It appears when the time is up. Given this, how can you reasonably say: 'I will call upon God in my old age and not now?' Should you die young, your life would go in vain. Moreover, note that there should be no consideration of time and place, purity or impurity for worshipping God. That can be done at all times, in all places, under all conditions. It never brings harm. There being no certainty as to when one's death will come, there similarly should be no reservation regarding the time for worship. Suppose I am in an unclean state. If I should die at that moment, will I be unable to call on God? Why then do the scriptures instruct us to discern between purity and impurity? They do so to instil single-mindedness, to make the restless mind steady through its pure resolution. Discernment between purity and impurity is very much essential along the journey of one's spiritual path. It is not, however, the primary point. Calling upon God is paramount.

Sadhanas should be done in private—the more secluded, the better. It should not be done before others, as that can stimulate one's ego. People of rajasic nature perform sadhana in front of others to gain honour. The Master used to say: 'Sadhana is to be done mentally, in some corner, or some secluded place.'



'Uddhava Gita', by Keshav Venkataraghavan

The conversation with Uddhava, in the Bhagavata, is extremely good. Those who read that section of the Bhagavata where the message of renunciation is expounded will surely benefit. It is not possible to do dhyana and japa at all times. Therefore, at such times, one should read holy books or engage in spiritual discussions. Never allow the mind to think bad thoughts. The moment you allow that, it will try to ruin you. That is why one should keep in one's mind some noble thought or other to hold on to. Thinking holy thoughts, studying holy books, engaging in spiritual discussions, performing noble acts—one should always keep the mind busy like this. Then only, in due course, the real divine nature of the Atman will manifest.

Within the course of twenty-four hours the human mind changes in many diverse ways. There is no end to it. Now it is very cheerful, but no one can even predict when it will be disturbed. Such is its restless nature. It is very difficult to catch where it will run at any moment. One gains mastery over the mind by continuous dhyana. Then the restless movement of the mind cannot deceive the spiritual aspirant. The moment the mind wanders away from dhyana, the aspirant recognizes it. He brings it back and

plunges it in dhyana. By repeatedly doing so, the mind becomes calm. Thereafter, it does not stray as much; it remains fixed on the subject one selects, thinking of no other thing.

Call upon God by whatever name or form you like. But should anyone ask you about your Chosen Ideal, stop talking to him that instant. There is a great possibility of harm to the aspirant if such private subjects of spiritual life are disclosed to others.

Ishta Nishtha

Nishtha! Nishtha! You need immense *nishtha* [one-pointed love]. Do you understand? Forget everything. Let only God remain within and without. Give up all else; keep him alone.

See the Muslims, what fiery *nishtha*! Giving up all activity they daily engage in namaz. See also how beautiful their unity is. They all chant the namaz together. And what are you doing? You only create divisions in the name of God, taxing your brains over who is superior or inferior. When will you call upon him? My dear, as God has himself taken these diverse forms, can there be in him any greater or lesser? Everything is verily he. This divisive attitude is the product of a small mind. Shame! *Nishtha* for your

Chosen Ideal is primary. What purpose can such divisive thinking serve? Such divisive attitudes depart from one who develops the appropriate type of love for his Chosen Ideal.

You call upon God. Why then does there remain such dissension in you? Is the God of the Muslims different from the God of the Christians? God is not many. He is One. How can there be great or small in him? The God of these people, the God of those people—what kind of talk is this? One cannot realize God with such a narrow mind. Your Ishta is great for you; their Ishta is great for them. But Ishta is One. The only difference is in the name. The spiritual attitude is what matters. The same God who is your Ishta is also the same God who is their Ishta. They call him by one name. You call him by another. This is the only difference. Why then do you hold on to such divisive thoughts? Whoever desires God must renounce such narrowness.

Tulsidas and Ramprasad each experienced their respective Ishatas. What great renunciation, what intense love Ramprasad had. He scolded Mother Kali, pleading like a child with her as if she were his own mother. People lovingly plead and insist only with other human beings. Having no physical body Kali is not human. Still, Ramprasad childishly insisted and pleaded lovingly. What extreme faith and devotion one must have to do this! One must think of one's Ishta as dearer than the dearest, as one's very Self—greater than one's kin, far more than one's own.

(To be continued)

Note

1. In Rishikesh a *satra*, almshouse, called Baba Kale-Kambliwale was established by Swami Vishuddhananda Sarasvati with the help of the rich Marwari businessmen of Calcutta. He was called Kale-Kambliwala because he used to always wrap a black blanket around himself. Many sadhus could not stay in Rishikesh, though it was

a beautiful place for spiritual austerities, because there was extreme difficulty in obtaining alms. That swami was engaged in austerities for a long time. Therefore, it can be said with certainty that he also experienced such inconveniences. He came to Calcutta only with the intention of removing such inconveniences. Coming to Calcutta, instead of begging from door to door, he undertook a unique means to fulfil his objective. He stood on the sidewalk of Bara-bazar day and night. It was then the rainy season, and ignoring the excessive downpour he remained standing with a firm determination to give up his life for his noble mission. Moreover, he gave up eating and drinking entirely. Two or three days passed in that condition; then the Marwari devotees came to know about him and came to learn from him the reason why he was standing and fasting in that way. He replied to their enquiries saying: 'If you give me all that I want, I will tell you. Otherwise, I will continue in this state and I will not accept food or water.' Thus, even after nearly a week's time had passed, and not receiving any assurances of his wishes being met, he spoke not a single word to anybody. At last the rich Marwari businessmen promised to fulfil his hope, fearing that if the sadhu were to give up his body in this condition, much inauspiciousness would befall them. They promised to fulfil his wish. Then he said: 'In Rishikesh it is very difficult for the sadhus to beg for alms. Please arrange for the simple alms of bread and soup for them, so that they can call upon God without any worries.' Everyone was astounded and at the same time charmed by this selfless plea and started working towards fulfilling his mission with great joy. Only when they gave him such assurances the swami started taking food and drink. Thereafter the Marwaris organized a meeting, collected a good amount of money, and established that *satra*. Afterwards, following the wish of Kale-Kambli Baba, they established roadside inns where they arranged to offer simple food as alms for the sadhus and fakirs on the road leading to remote and difficult-to-reach holy places of Uttarakhand such as Gangotri, Jamunotri, Kedarnath, and Badrinath. In fact, due to the merit of his austerities all those places of pilgrimage have now become easily accessible.

Svarajya Siddhih: Attaining Self-dominion

Gangadharendra Saraswati

Translated from Sanskrit and annotated by Swami Narasimhananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

THE OPINION OF SANKHYA, Kapila's school, has been quashed. Now, the stand of Yoga, Vaisheshika, and Nyaya philosophies that Ishvara is the instrumental cause of Prakriti, the universe, and so on is set aside, and the stand that the non-dual Brahman is both the material and the instrumental cause of creation is established in accordance with Vedic statements and by categorically quashing the opposite views—this is done in the next two verses.

नेशोऽधिष्ठातुमीशोऽतनुकरणगुणस्तार्किकाणां प्रधानं
स्याच्चेतन्वक्षवत्तं सुचरितद्विरितोद्भूतभोगप्रसङ्गः ।
दुःखाद्यं कुर्वतोऽस्य प्रसरति विषमाचारनैर्धृण्यदोषः
कर्मप्सोशक्रकाऽवस्थितिहतिविफलत्वाऽन्यथासिद्ध्यःस्युः
11११।

According to the Logicians, Ishvara is free from qualities like body, senses, will, and effort. [And so,] Ishvara is incapable of creating *pradhāna*. And if Ishvara is held to have qualities like body and senses, then Ishvara will also be subject to the experiences of happiness and misery arising out of the merits and demerits done, just like a *jiva*. Having created the universe, full of misery, [if it is held that Ishvara, who is considered free and without a controller—to avoid the fallacy of infinite regress—creates happiness and misery also] then Ishvara will suffer from the defects of incongruous actions and cruelty. [If it is held that the *jivas* experience happiness and misery due to] the effects of their actions, then endless cycles, infinite regress, the futility of

Ishvara, and the proof of the universe without the instrumental cause of Ishvara—all these defects arise.

The followers of the Nyaya philosophy believe that Ishvara has created this universe out of his will from the eternal atoms. Every effect must have a cause. Then this world, which follows a definite order, should be due to some cause and, according to Nyaya, this cause is Ishvara. We cannot see Ishvara because it does not have a gross body, but that does not mean Ishvara does not exist. Ishvara has infinite knowledge and is all-merciful. At the beginning of creation Ishvara created the Vedas. According to the Vaisheshika philosophy, the entire creation consists of the basic units of the four kinds of atoms—earth, water, fire, and air. However, behind these basic units is the creative or destructive will of the Supreme Being who controls the activities of these atoms and also the direction the lives of individual souls will take. So, the creation or destruction begins with the will of the Supreme Being, Maheshvara, the ruler of the universe. Maheshvara wills to create a universe in which individual beings may get appropriate experiences of pleasure and pain according to their actions. The process of creation and destruction of the world being beginningless, the first creation of the world cannot be known. Every creation is preceded by destruction, and every destruction

is preceded by some creation. So, God creatively wills according to the merits and demerits done by an individual soul. Upon such a will of God, these merits and demerits come to fruition, and the creation is unfolded with each individual soul experiencing happiness and misery according to its actions done in the past. Thus God's will and the effects of actions of the individual souls create the activity of the atoms of air. The air-atoms combine in dyads and triads and form the gross element of air, which vibrates without stop in the eternal space. Similarly, the atoms of water create the gross element of water, which exists in air. The atoms of earth create, in a similar way, the gross element of earth, which exists in water. From the atoms of fire arises the gross element of fire with its light. After this process, by the will of God, the embryo of the universe is formed out of the atoms of light and earth.

The *Vaisheshika Sutra* of Kanada asserts the existence of God: 'But name and effect are the mark (of the existence) of beings distinguished from ourselves. Because name and effect follow from perception.'⁹⁸ God creates this universe and is thus its owner, its master. It is common practice to give different names to different people. Such names are usually given by the parents upon the birth of their children. This they can do because they perceive the birth of a new human being. We also have generic names for a class or type of things such as 'pot' or 'cloth'. These classes or types of things acquire these generic names because of the will of Ishvara. Though the parents think that they name their children, it is Ishvara who directs them to do so. All the names are thus proofs of the existence of Ishvara. Similarly, effects of causes also indicate the existence of Ishvara. For instance, the earth should have a Creator because we find the effects of earth such as a pot. However, in this case, that which has effects like the earth does not refer to something

that can be produced by the body; or something that can be produced by the will of something, which also has been produced; or something about which it is not known whether it has been produced by an agent; or something the agent of production of which is doubted.

The term 'logicians' in this verse refers to the schools of thought that establish the cause of this universe by reasoning alone, mainly by resorting to inference. They are the schools of Yoga, Nyaya, and Vaisheshika. They hold that Ishvara has no body and senses. Ishvara has neither external nor internal sense organs, nor the appropriate desire to perform any action. Ishvara is of the nature of pure Consciousness and is invisible to others. The supreme Ishvara is without limbs and without external characteristics like form. Therefore, it is not visible and is only a pointer to *pradhāna* and atoms. Ishvara is incapable of setting into action or bringing characteristics to *pradhāna* and atoms. We see in the world that only a conscious person, like a potter endowed with a body and form with limbs, can perceive, through eyes and other sense organs, and touch with hands different forms like clay and create objects like a pot. Since Ishvara is without body or sense organs and cannot perceive through them, it is incapable of touching or creating something.

Objection: It is seen that even if some parts of the body or some sense organs are damaged, some persons get their work done through other means or through the help of other people. Similarly, it can be held that though Ishvara is incapable of creation, it gets the work done through *pradhāna*, which has subtle body and organs.

Reply: If that stand were to be accepted, then Ishvara would be subject to the merits and demerits arising out of good and bad actions, and would have to experience happiness and misery just like a jiva. A body is seen to be always the locus of the exhaustion of karmas, and an

individual soul takes a body only to exhaust the karmas. Hence, if Ishvara is held to take up the body of *pradhāna*, then Ishvara would have to experience happiness and misery, which is absurd.

Objection: Let it be so. What harm is there to hold that Ishvara possesses a body and sense organs just like a potter?

Reply: Even then the same problem persists. If Ishvara is held to have a body and sense organs, then it would have to experience happiness and misery as the result of its good and bad actions, as the body is an instrument for the exhaustion of karmas. Further, it is held that the merciful, unattached, and free Ishvara would surely not create the universe for the misery of living beings. Now, if we hold that Ishvara creates the universe, whom does it create the universe for? For others, or for itself? If it is for others, then the others would also create for some others, and this cycle would go on and the argument would suffer from the fallacy of infinite regress. Also, Ishvara would become dependent on another entity just like the *jiva*. If it is held that Ishvara creates the universe for itself, then also there are problems. We find that the universe is full of misery. Also, while some people suffer, some others are happy. Having created this universe, why should Ishvara be partial in its actions? Why should there be an incongruity in the experiences of the individual souls? This makes Ishvara incongruous. Also, since Ishvara gives so much suffering to the universe, it would mean that Ishvara is cruel.

To avoid these fallacies, if we hold that Ishvara grants happiness and misery according to the actions performed by the individual souls, then it means that Ishvara is bound by actions. Further, Ishvara, who gives the fruits of actions, would be dependent on the actions, and this leads to the defect of interdependence. Also, if the actions done in the previous birth bring

about the present life, then the previous birth was also brought about by an earlier birth, and so on. This leads to infinite regress. And, if the actions were to lead to the effects in the form of next birth or creation, then there would be no necessity of an Ishvara, since all the individual souls would determine their births and creations. That also means that Ishvara would no longer be the instrumental cause of the creation of the universe.

If it is held that Ishvara creates this universe based on the karmas of the individual souls, then it would lead to another defect because Ishvara creates the universe based on the karmas of the individual souls. This would further make the *pradhāna* and the atoms act, which leads to the creation of the universe. Then, the body and the sense organs would be created, which are instruments for performing actions that would further create karmas or effects of actions, which again would form the basis of the creation of the universe by Ishvara. This becomes a vicious cycle.

If we hold that the universe is created due to the effects of actions of individual souls in the previous births, then it leads to the fallacy of the cause being unseen. We see that seeds sprout and there is no apparent cause or agent. The followers of the schools of Nyaya and Vaisheshika counter this argument by holding that even the seeds and the sprouts are created by Ishvara, and they are also effects. We do not see it not because it does not exist but because it is invisible. If it could be clearly proven that there is no invisible cause or agent of the sprouts coming out of seeds, then only it can be accepted that they do not have any cause. In the absence of such a clear proof, what can be best held is only a case of doubt, and that does not suffice to negate the presence of an invisible agent or cause in the form of Ishvara. This is the stand of the schools of Nyaya and Vaisheshika.

The above arguments cannot be accepted. In the case of seeds shooting sprouts, we do not know the cause of the sprouts by direct perception. Also, the cause of the tree is the seed, and the seed is the effect of the tree. Hence, we are put in a logical predicament of the ‘chicken and egg’, and it is impossible to ascertain which came first. Also, if we were to hold that Ishvara is the cause of the sprouts, then it cannot be proven by direct perception but only by inference. If we have to infer the cause as Ishvara, then Ishvara being subject to the effects of actions, the incongruence of Ishvara, and the dependence of Ishvara on the effects or actions—all these fallacies would come up.

Objection: If there is a problem with inference, we rely on the verbal testimony of the Vedas and hold Ishvara as the cause of this universe.

Reply: Verbal testimony cannot be relied on because the Purva Mimamsa of Jaimini does not accept this view. And if it be still held that the Vedas are the proof, then also it cannot be accepted because since the Vedas have been created by Ishvara, Ishvara cannot be proved by the Vedas. To hold this leads to the defect of interdependence.

Objection: Even the Ishvara accepted by Vedanta suffers from the same defects.

Reply: No, this is not true. We Vedantins accept Ishvara as the material cause non-different from Brahman. It is essentially the same conscious principle conditioned by maya, and such Ishvara has been validated by the Vedas. Since the Vedas do not require an additional proof, we hold that such Ishvara has created this universe. Thus, it is not only established that Brahman alone is the cause of this universe, but that the Ishvara accepted by other schools of thought are also set aside.

The schools of Nyaya and Vaisheshika take a commonsense view of the universe that is close to the day-to-day experience of human beings.

They take into account the special characteristics of atoms and do not accept that things continuously change. They are also of the opinion that not all atoms can create all kinds of materials and that specific atoms are required to create specific objects. They hold that the effect is not potentially present in the cause. They take a different view and hold that the material cause, like clay, has some power within it and the accessory and other instrumental causes have some other powers. The coming together of these causes destroys the material cause and produces an effect, which was not there before but was produced afresh. This view is countered by the statement that if what is non-existent is produced, then even impossible things as a flower in the sky could be produced. The Nyaya and Vaisheshika schools refute this objection by holding that it is not being told that what is non-existent is produced, but that what has been produced was non-existent.

(*To be continued*)

Reference

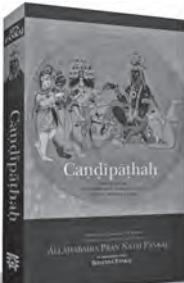
98. *Vaisheshika Sutra*, 2.1.18–19.

The Vedanta requires of us faith, for conclusiveness cannot be reached by mere argumentation. Then why, has the slightest flaw, detected in the position of the schools of Sankhya and Nyaya, been overwhelmed with a fusillade of dialectics? In whom, moreover, are we to put our faith? Everybody seems to be mad over establishing his own view; if, according to Vyasa, even the great Muni Kapila, ‘the greatest among perfected souls’, is himself deeply involved in error, then who would say that Vyasa may not be so involved in a greater measure? Did Kapila fail to understand the Vedas?

—*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 6.212

REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications



Candipāṭhah

Allahabadia Prem Pankaj;
in association with Bhavana
Pankaj

Motilal Banarsi Dass Publishers, 41 UA
Bunglow Road, Jawahar Nagar, Delhi
110 007. Website: www.mlbd.com.
2013. xxiii + 461 pp. ₹ 395.

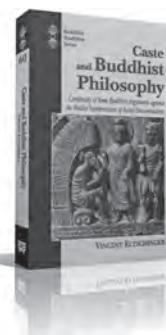
Any translation of a divine text of soul-stirring prayers embedded in the heart of the sacred *Markandeya Purana* belongs to a genre different from the usual run of literature. And in the book under review what lends incremental value to the treatise is the intensity of the translator's fervour and dedication to his sacred service, devotion to and faith in the Devi, and sensitiveness to the incantatory power of the hymns. While the translation of the holy book is marked by fidelity to the original and simplicity of language, its true merit lies in its usefulness as a potent aid to the performance of the ritualistic worship of the deity in accordance with the rules mandated by time-honoured religious customs. *Candipāṭhah* is a hymnal necklace, in which the central gem of *Sri Durga Saptashati* is elegantly placed between the allied gems of other hymns. The translation is bound to help *upasakas*, votaries, of the Devi by acquainting them with the meaning and significance of the stotras and the traditional mode of worship. As the devout translator rightly points out, *Sri Durga Saptashati*, popularly known as *Sri Devi Mahatmyam*, is the Devi's *shabdavatara*, verbal avatara.

The book is carefully structured to make it reader friendly. The contents are classified under four sections. The initial twenty-five pages contain such details as the scheme of transliteration, dedication, important instructions or suggestions, and so on. The second section, entitled 'Introductory Essay', contains useful and rare information regarding the Devi's *upasana*, meditation,

and also recounts the infinite glory of the Divine Mother. It traces the Vedic origin of the hymns and also discusses the chronological antiquity of the esoteric text. Many interesting subjects are dealt with in this section: the Divine Mother's essential embodiment of primordial energy; the inseparability of her kinetic force, Prakriti, or maya, from the quiescent state of Purusha, or Brahman; her divine status as the source of strength and power behind the trinity Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, and the *dasha mahavidyas*; the unrestricted accessibility of the *agamas*, tantric scriptures, to all aspirants as contrasted with the restricted accessibility of *nigamas*, Vedic texts; a brief synopsis of the story of *Sri Durga Saptashati*; and the allegorical significance of the persona and accoutrements of the Devi. The third and crucial section contains the original Sanskrit text, the Roman transliteration, and the English translation of the entire hymnal corpus of *Candipāṭhah*. The fourth section contains the appendices dealing with: (i) Names, adjectives, epithets, incarnations, and associates of the Divine Mother that appear in the text; (ii) weapons of the Goddess mentioned in *Sri Durga Saptashati*; (iii) glossary; and (iv) first line index of the Sanskrit verses.

The book is a valuable guide to the mental and ritualistic worship of the Devi. The English translation is faithful, exhaustive, and capable of fostering the spark of devotion in aspirants wedded to the worship of the Devi. It is a welcome addition to the recondite literature on the Divine Mother.

N Hariharan
Madurai



Caste and Buddhist Philosophy

Vincent Eltschinger

Motilal Banarsi Dass Publishers. 2012.
xxi + 235 pp. ₹ 500.

The book consists of three chapters: 'Canonical Antecedents', 'Dharmakirti and his Successors', and 'Conclusion'. In the 'Foreword' the editors, Alexander von Rospett and Ernst Steinkellner, claim that there is a rigorous denial of the brahma ideas of caste by Buddha and his followers. The book's subtitle, 'Continuity of Some Buddhist Arguments against the Realist Interpretation of Social Denominations', is a synthesis of this position.

The first chapter offers a schematic and typological picture of the canonical antecedents to the polemics on caste based on Buddhist texts. The author, in the second chapter, offers a detailed analysis of the arguments against the caste system as propounded by Dharmakirti, the great seventh-century Buddhist philosopher, and his successors as against the position of Kumarila Bhatta, the celebrated teacher of Mimamsa philosophy, who supported the caste system. The third chapter consists of the author's views on caste based on his close study of the texts, which seem to be odd and, sometimes, even wrong. He says that in present-day India many points raised in Buddhist texts remain burning questions on caste.

The author also observes that though Buddhism is against the caste system, it made no real social reformation in India. The great religious and social reformation, with exceptions of course, though still worked within the old system, helped clean many wrong practices. Vincent Eltschinger clarifies the notion of caste, as jati or varna, saying that a graded system in every society is natural because it does not depend on human thought or arbitrary convention. The author, on his part, needs to revise his views on the basis of India's present democratic society. Besides, he is not quite confident of the validity of anti-caste Buddhist arguments, which himself explains thus: 'A good understanding of the subject requires a study of epigraphic and annalist documents since the situation may have been, and indeed must have been far more complex than the picture depicted in the polemical literature. Then only will we be in a position to avoid the rumours and the biases to which this work inevitably falls' (175). Since the author is conscious about the limitations of his work, it is necessary to revise the book in the light of relevant contents from the *Dhammapada* and other Pali texts.

The author also needs to rethink the title of the book in terms of scanty materials on Buddhist philosophy as compared, apart from Kumarila Bhatta's view, to the large number of Smritis and other literature on caste. It is also necessary to understand the significant contribution by Swami Vivekananda to Buddhism with reference to his talk on 'Buddhism: The Fulfilment of Hinduism', at the World's Parliament of Religions in 1893.

The work no doubt reflects considerable labour on the part of the author, but raises several issues for further investigation and evaluation.

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Swami Vivekananda: Essential Writings

Comp. Victor M Parachin

Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York
10545. Website: www.orbisbooks.com.
2012. 185 pp. US \$ 22.

There are many people outside India, as it is well known, interested in yoga and meditation. And whether it is coincidence or some law of spiritual growth, many are gradually discovering Swami Vivekananda and his teachings.

The compiler, who is co-founder of Yoga-Spirit Academy in Tulsa, Oklahoma, an ordained minister of religion, and a yoga and meditation instructor, gravitated to Swamiji's literature in his search for Truth and found that he was soon exploring and expanding his consciousness.

The book is an excellent compilation from the vast corpus of the literature on Swami Vivekananda. It opens with a brief introduction to Swamiji as a youth and how he came to Sri Ramakrishna. When he finally arrived at Chicago in 1893 to attend the first Parliament of Religions, Swamiji brought yoga and the wisdom of the East to the West, which is still influencing Western minds.

The publisher has endeavoured to present the works of different personalities through its 'Modern Spiritual Masters Series', which enlightens the mind and challenges human conscience.

PB

REPORTS

Commemoration of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda

The following centres organized various programmes to commemorate the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda. **Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata:** A youth convention on 18 August 2013, attended by 225 delegates and 150 observers. **Antpur:** A devotees' convention on 17 August, attended by about 100 devotees. **Chapra:** Youth conventions on 27 and 29 July, in which 1,600 youths participated. A doctors' convention on 28 July, in which 78 doctors took part. **Chengalpattu:** Processions, devotional music, and film shows on Swamiji at Perunkaranai, Velur, Mettugramam, Kavithandalam, Kavur, Paramasiva Nagar, Chinna Kayapakkam, Nadupalani, and Sothupakkam on 27 and 28 July and 2, 3, 4, 10, 11, 17, and 18 August respectively. **Chennai Students' Home:** Exhibition, cultural competitions, and lectures at 8 polytechnic colleges in Chennai and Kanchipuram in July, in which 6,000 students participated. **Coimbatore Math:** A state-level seminar on 'Religious Harmony' on 17 August, attended by 822 delegates. Besides, in association with **Coimbatore Mission Vidyalaya**, the centre held a 12-km race on 18 August, in which 1,236 people took part. **Delhi:** A puppet show, inaugurated by Swami Suhitananda, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, on 11 August, attended by about 800 people. **Dhaka** (Bangladesh): In commemoration of Swamiji's visit to Pogose School, Dhaka, and his lecture there on



Youth convention at Advaita Ashrama



Women's convention at Salem

31 March 1901, the centre and the school jointly conducted a programme, comprising speeches and a music concert, on 29 August. A plaque giving the details of Swamiji's visit to the school was also unveiled. **Fiji:** Cultural competitions and programmes were held in 21 schools from 12 to 16 August. The high commissioner of India to Fiji was the chief guest at the inaugural session. Gift packets comprising books on Swamiji and his photo were distributed among the participants. **Kankurgachhi:** A talk on Swamiji by Swami Suhitananda on 25 August, attended by about 800 persons. **Madurai:** On the initiative of the centre pictures of Swamiji with his sayings were installed at the railway stations of Thenkasi, Shencottah, Kadayanallur, and Sankaran Kovil on 29 August. **Narottam Nagar:** Classical music concerts on 25 and 26 August, attended by about 700 people. **Porbandar:** A seminar for teachers on 9 August, attended by 50 teachers. **Raipur:** A short-drama competition on Swamiji on 27 July, in which children from 10 schools participated. **Salem:** Value education programmes for parents in Namakkal district and Salem on 20 and 27 July respectively; in all, 136 parents attended the programmes. Discourses on Swamiji from 26 to 28 July in the ashrama premises. Value education programme at a college in Konganapuram, Dist. Salem, from 6 to 8 August, in which 320 students participated. A day-long women's convention on 30 August, attended by 1,600 women. **Swamiji's Ancestral House:** Special lectures on 27, 29, and 30 July, attended by about 840 devotees. On the centre's initiative 6 institutions in and around Kolkata organized special programmes from 6 to 15 August, attended by 2,050 people. **Vadodara:** An International Youth Conference on 10 and 11 August, in which around 600 youths drawn from 24 countries participated. The conference was inaugurated by Dr A P J Abdul Kalam, former president of India. Swami Suhitananda presided

over one of the sessions. The programme included speeches by distinguished people, a video conference, and cultural presentations.

New Mission Sub-centre

A sub-centre of **Ramakrishna Sevashrama, Chittagong** (Bangladesh), has been started at **Dhorla**. Its address is Ramakrishna Sevashrama, Village: Dhorla, P.O. Kanungopara, Boalkhali, Dist. Chittagong, Bangladesh; phone: +880 1711 231748.

News from Branch Centres

Swami Suhitananda inaugurated the newly renovated auditorium, Vivekananda Sabhangan, at **Ramakrishna Math (Yogodayan), Kankurgachhi**, on 25 August.

Swami Vagishananda inaugurated the newly constructed dispensary building at **Ramakrishna Math, Cooch Behar**, on 28 August.

Relief

Distress Relief · The following centres distributed various items to needy people. **Baranagar Math**: 100,000 halogen tablets from 5 to 10 August. **Belgharia**: 578 saris and 753 lungis on 7 and 9 August. **Nagpur**: 1,245 school uniforms, 4,645 notebooks, and 1,215 pens among the students of 27 village schools from 5 July to 10 August. **Sylhet** (Bangladesh): 4,550 l of milk and 9,100 packets of biscuits from 1 April to 30 June.

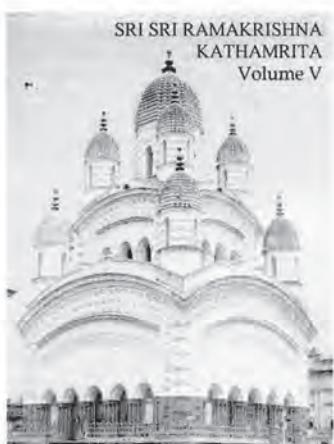
Drought Relief · **Shivanahalli** centre continued its drought relief work among the affected families. The centre supplied 3,492,000 l of drinking water to 9,950 families of 8 villages in Kolar district from 21 July to 25 August.

Flood Relief · **Kankhal** centre continued its relief operations among the victims of the flash-floods in Rudraprayag district. The centre distributed 5,700 kg flour, 238 kg dal, 500 kg potatoes, 52 kg soya bean, 37 kg spices, 3,326 kg sugar, 1,180 pressure cookers, 349 cooking pots, 1,076 bowls, 1,000 spoons, 165 buckets, 600 mugs, 530 chaddars, 252 blankets, 390 polythene sheets, 120

T-shirts, 150 tubes of toothpaste, 6,320 match-boxes, and other items among 1,167 families of 30 inaccessible villages in Rudraprayag district from 1 to 5 August. Besides, medical treatment was provided to 458 flood-affected patients. **Dehradun** centre also continued the relief operations from its camp at Joshi Math in Chamoli district. The centre distributed 7,510 kg rice, 9,910 kg flour, 2,607 kg dal, 1,702 l edible oil, 563 kg spices, 1,637 kg salt, 475 kg tea, 3,044 kg sugar, 260 kg molas-ses, 49 stoves, 70 utensil sets (each set comprising 2 cooking vessels, 3 jars, 6 tumblers, 6 plates, and 6 bowls), 3,462 blankets, 180 sets of books and stationery materials, 200 tarpaulins, 252 torches, and 500 solar lanterns among 2,137 affected families in Pandukeshwar, Govindghat, and Niti blocks from 2 to 26 August. From 22 to 26 August **Chandipur** centre served cooked food (khichri) and distributed 1,000 kg chira, 322 kg muri, 300 kg sugar, 455 torches, 200 candles, 100 matchboxes, and 100,000 halogen tablets among 1,320 families of 9 villages in Chandipur block of Purba Medinipur district whose houses had been inundated by floods caused by heavy rainfall. On 23 and 24 August **Saradapitha** served cooked food (khichri) and biscuits among the 115 families—belonging to Liluah, Bhattacharjee, Ghughupara, Jhautala, and Amtala areas of Bally Jagacha block in Howrah district—who had taken temporary shelter in nearby school buildings in the wake of water-logging caused by heavy rainfall.

Relief work near Badrinath





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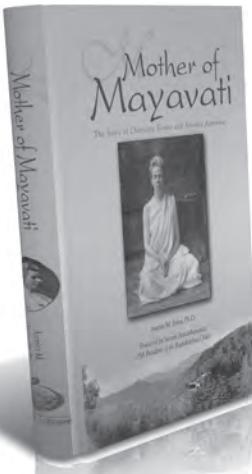
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Mother of Mayavati

—Amrita M. Salm



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It was Swami Vivekananda's dream to start a centre on the Himalayan heights. He wanted this centre to be dedicated to Advaita philosophy alone. In his vision, it was to be a centre where the East and the West would meet to give full and free expression to the Highest Truth of Non-dualism, without any of the weakening ingredients of the philosophy of the dualistic schools. His dream was actualized by a couple from England, Mr. and Mrs. Seviers, especially by the latter. After the founding of Mayavati Advaita Ashrama, soon Mr. Sevier passed away. Then it was Mrs. Sevier who, through her gritty determination and lofty character, built and consolidated the centre. In course of her amazing life there, she eventually emerged to become the 'Mother of Mayavati'.

Mother of Mayavati is the inspiring story of Mrs. Sevier's life—a life exemplifying complete dedication to the spiritual ideal, purity, and selfless love for all. And with her life-story is entwined the early stages of the history of Advaita Ashrama. The book contains also her letters and brilliant articles, and even important documents related to her and the centre. Forty-nine colourful pictures have also been included, further embellishing the beauty and worth of the book.

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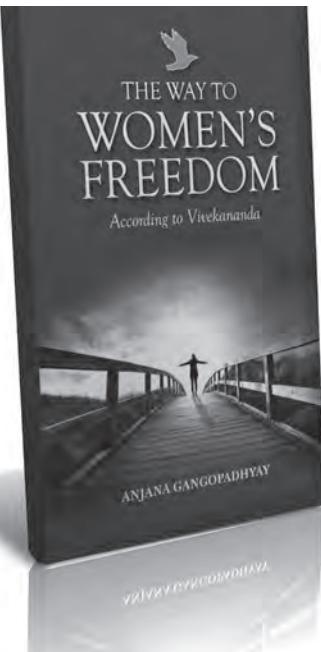
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Anjana Gangopadhyay



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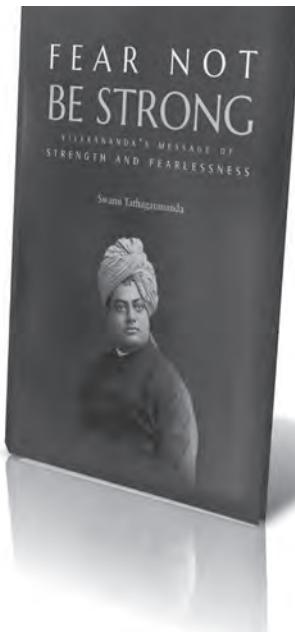
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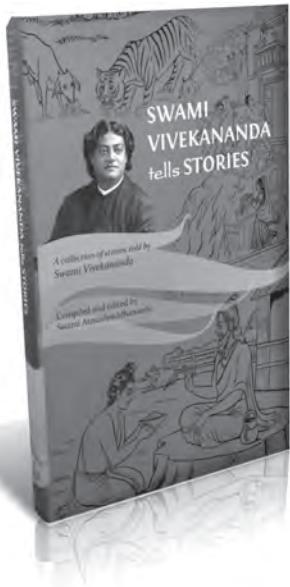
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Swamiji was a wonderful storyteller. His talks and writings are interspersed with numerous anecdotes and illustrations. Some of these are well-known, while others are not, but they are all relevant and thought-provoking, revealing his profound knowledge of human nature—its potential and its limitations. This collection contains most of the stories from his nine-volume Complete Works published by us. The 106 stories contained in this volume have been classified under 10 headings. Some are just a paragraph, while others go on for several pages, but all are sure to give readers fresh insights. These stories have been illustrated with line drawings.

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